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GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

High and dry

Piet Oudolf's planting for a sublime green roof

EXCLUSIVE
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Stuart-Smith
at Serge Hill

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7 SUMMER GARDENS

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Welcome



JOHN CAMPBELL

Piet Oudolf is best known as a designer of large-scale perennial plantings, so it is a welcome surprise to discover his latest project is focused instead on green roofs and a micro forest. This issue, we visit this garden in the Netherlands, which Piet believes is one of the most beautiful private gardens he has ever created (page 42). He worked in concert with the architect, and designer Tom de Witte, to adapt his 'Oudolfian' style to rooftops with only 20cm of growing medium, and he created a lush woodland garden below with mature trees and a frothy understorey of shade-loving plants.

This month we also reveal the details of our exclusive reader event with Tom and Sue Stuart-Smith at their home garden, and the Serge Hill Project for Gardening, Creativity and Health that they are developing, which includes the Plant Library of Tom's design studio (page 107). The day will include lots of time with Tom and Sue, guided tours and time to explore the various spaces, including the Barn Garden, the prairie garden and meadows. It's an exciting opportunity to learn more about this burgeoning project, which we covered in our recent February 2023 edition (Issue 322), and which has community and gardening for wellbeing at its heart.

And there are lots more beautiful summer gardens to enjoy within these pages, including a chocolate-box cottage garden with a contemporary twist (page 60), the country garden of a Scottish manse filled with food and flowers (page 76), a designer take on a sloping city space (page 90) and a small suburban garden packed with cacti, succulents and subtropical-style planting (page 84).

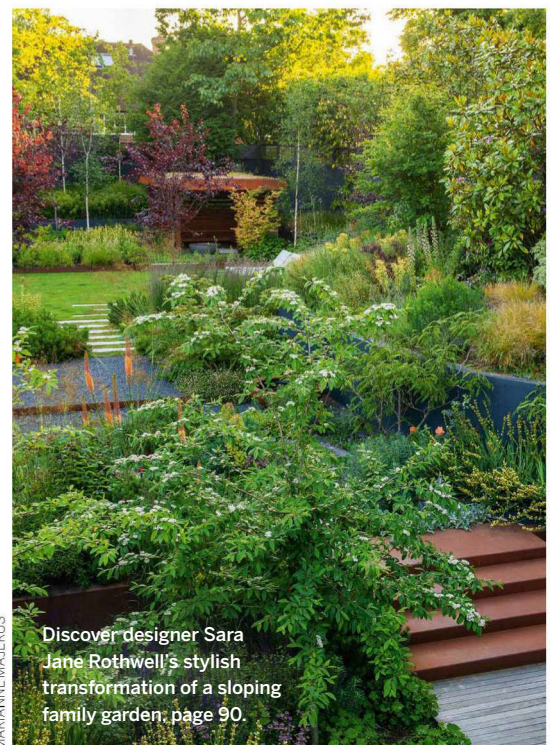
Stephanie Mahon

STEPHANIE MAHON, EDITOR



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MARIANNE MAIERUS

Discover designer Sara Jane Rothwell's stylish transformation of a sloping family garden, page 90.



Creating a legacy

Cancer Research UK announces a very special collaboration for this year's RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival, and a design that will leave a lasting impression

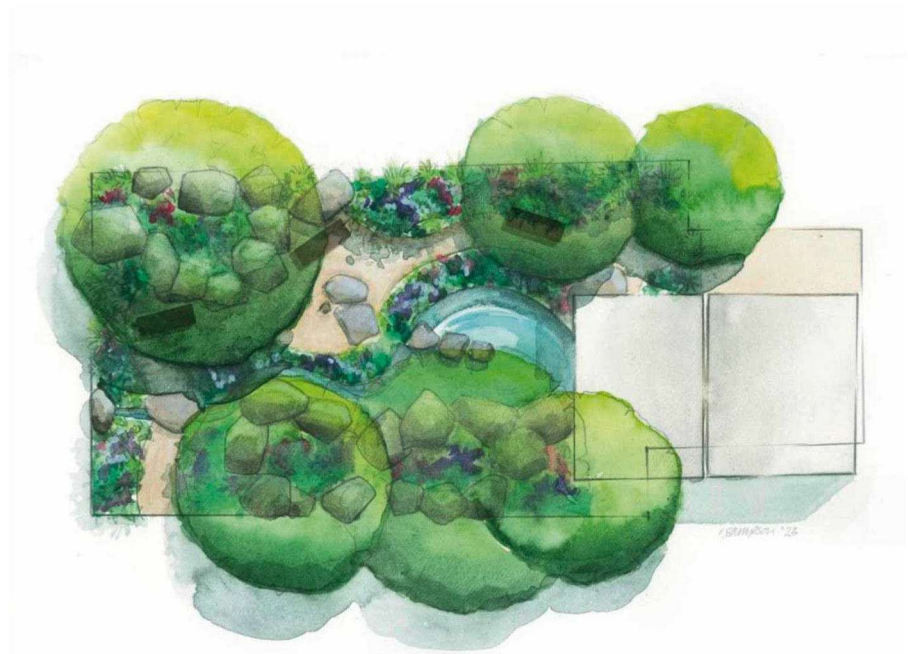
Excitement and anticipation grows as we look forward to the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival, which takes place between 4 – 9 July. As always, visitors can expect to enjoy a celebration of horticultural prowess, inspiring floral displays and a cornucopia of colour. This year, Cancer Research UK has collaborated with award-winning designer Paul Hervey-Brookes to showcase its Legacy Garden, a life-affirming space that represents the hope and optimism that's brought about by gifts in Wills, helping to beat cancer for future generations.

A garden to remember

Paul Hervey-Brookes is an award-winning garden designer renowned for creating multi-layered habitats with his uniquely sensitive touch and plant-based philosophy. As a creator of show gardens for more than 10 years, he has an impressive collection of 12

“The carved handprints in the rocks powerfully remind us that cancer can affect anyone, at any age”

Gold medals to date, including awards won at RHS Chelsea Flower Show and RHS Hampton Court Palace. With the Legacy Garden, Paul has created a space where visitors can find reflection and contemplation; a place to consider a world where people can live longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.



The Cancer Research UK Legacy Garden elicits a tranquil woodland environment that will feature more than 3,000 plants, all carefully selected by Paul to evoke different feelings and moods. Be inspired by the lively green fronds of *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, enjoy the optimism of the upright stems of *Verbascum chaixii* or lose yourself in the delicate meadow rue, *Thalictrum*.

Paul has carefully curated a scheme that features green and white – colours that stimulate feelings of ease, relaxation and considered reflection. Purple and pinks have been selected as hues associated with wisdom and insightfulness. It's a bright and



Paul Hervey-Brookes

uplifting scheme that celebrates the joy of living and renewed hope brought about by legacy giving. A third of CRUK's income comes from gifts in Wills, which enables investment in cutting-edge science.

Filled with meaning

Visitors to the Cancer Research UK Legacy Garden will discover that it is full of symbolism. Stream inlets flow towards a central body of water, its continuing presence acts as a metaphor for the long-lasting value of a legacy gift. An isolated jetty in the water represents the fear and loneliness that cancer can bring, but facing the Pledge Pavilion symbolises hope, reminding those on a

difficult journey that they are not alone. Another focal point of the garden is the rocks. “The carved handprints in the rocks powerfully remind us that cancer can affect anyone, at any age,” says Paul. “I know first-hand the impact of this disease, the way it touches every aspect of our lives. For me there is no greater gift than leaving a legacy that has the promise of giving so many others the potential to live longer, better lives.”

A world free of cancer

The Cancer Research UK Legacy Garden is an opportunity to celebrate the

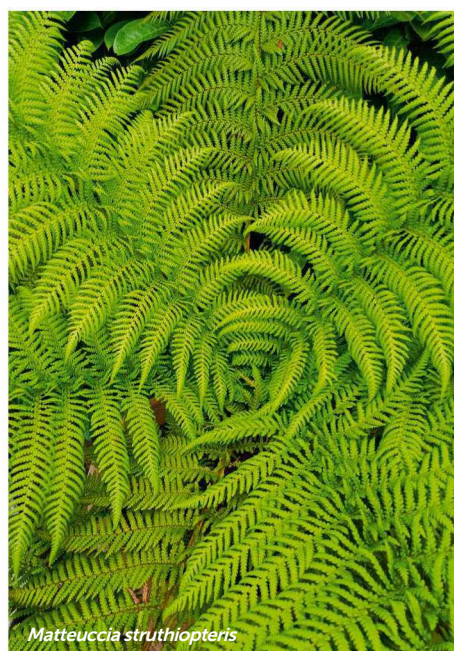
scientific discoveries and progress that has been made in cancer prevention, detection and treatment, alongside the hope that this has brought to those affected by cancer. It’s an opportunity to acknowledge that the people who pledge a gift in their Will today are helping to save lives tomorrow, and to inspire others to make a pledge of their own by leaving a gift to Cancer Research UK in their Will.

All those inspired by their visit to the Legacy Garden will have the opportunity to buy the plants featured within the garden on the final day of the show, Sunday 9 July. By giving the

plants a new lease of life, visitors can bring home a living memory and ensure the legacy of the garden lives on.

The following weekend, the plants will again be available to buy at Cancer Research UK’s pop-up at Linden Hall, Hampton between 14 – 16 July. Paul will be making a special appearance on Friday 14 July to share his advice and inspiration. Friday pop-up hours are 11.30am – 5pm, and Saturday – Sunday hours are 10am – 4pm.

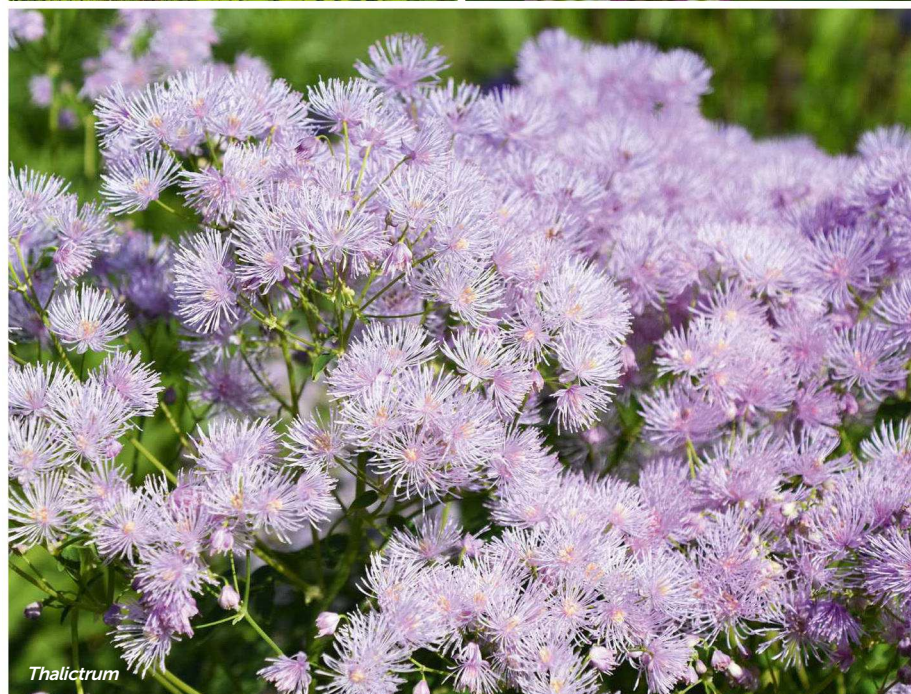
Visit cruk.org/giftsinwills to find out more about how you can make your pledge to help fund vital research.



Matteuccia struthiopteris



Astrantia



Thalictrum



Verbascum chaixii

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Sue Townsend's dreamy planting helps to combine two gardens into one, page 34.

RICHARD BLOOM



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Piet Oudolf's green roof by
Claire Takacs (page 42)

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subscribe to the digital edition of
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- Join us on an exclusive reader
day with Tom and Sue Stuart-
Smith at their home at Serge
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Design: Craig Atkinson

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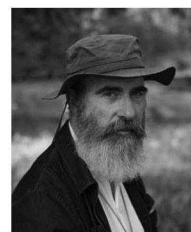
+44 (0)1483 762955 info@lcmd.org.uk

Contributors



Jill Calder

Jill creates the lovely illustrations for Ken Thompson's new column, page 29. *"I'm learning from – as well as illustrating – Ken's wise words; vital for my rather quirky garden in rural Fife."*



Tony Spencer

Tony explores a Piet Oudolf-designed balanced space with three roof gardens, page 42. *"Thrilled to write on Piet's design process for a smaller private garden, as it's a story not often told."*



Rory Duso

Rory visits Robert Stacewicz's exotic garden, page 84. *"Though Robert's garden is small, I got lost there for hours in his company, admiring his innovative plant choices."*

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS



James Basson

James lives in the South of France where he runs Scape Design, a practice specialising in low-maintenance and dry gardens. He is a fervent advocate for creating sustainable landscapes. The winner of four Chelsea Gold medals, he was awarded Best in Show in 2017.

Fergus Garrett

Fergus was appointed head gardener at Great Dixter by Christopher Lloyd in 1993. He is passionate about passing on his knowledge through student programmes at Dixter and worldwide lectures. He was awarded an RHS Associate of Honour in 2008 and an RHS Victoria Medal of Honour in 2019.

Anna Pavord

Anna's books include her bestseller *The Tulip* and most recently *Landskipping*. For 30 years she was *The Independent's* gardening correspondent. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

Dan Pearson

Dan is one of the UK's best-known garden designers. Eight of his gardens, including the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan, have won awards and he was awarded Best in Show for his garden at Chelsea in 2015. He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to horticulture.

Sarah Price

Sarah is one of the UK's most sought-after garden designers who gained worldwide recognition for her designs for the 2012 London Olympic Park. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012, 2018 and 2023, and was GMG Garden Columnist of the Year in 2016 for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

GARDENS

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Subscription enquiries and back issues

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UK/REST OF THE WORLD *Gardens Illustrated*, PO Box 3320,

3 Queensbridge, Northampton NN4 7BF.

USA/CANADA *Gardens Illustrated*, PO BOX 37495, Boone, IA 50037-0495 USA.

Advertising enquiries

+44 (0)117 300 8805 heather.golden@ourmedia.co.uk

Editorial enquiries

+44 (0)117 300 8622 gardens@gardensillustrated.com

Gardens Illustrated, Our Media Ltd (an Immediate Group Company),

Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST.

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MAGAZINE CONTACTS

EDITORIAL

Editor	Stephanie Mahon
Art director	David Grenham
Deputy editor	Sorrel Everton
Deputy art editor	Niki Goss
Production editor	Juliet Giles
Digital editor	Daisy Bowie-Sell
Commissioning content editor	Veronica Peerless
Content producer	Molly Blair
Botanical adviser	Dr James Compton

ADVERTISING

Group advertising manager	Laura Jones 0117 300 8509 laura.jones@ourmedia.co.uk
Portfolio advertising manager	Heather Golden 0117 300 8805 heather.golden@ourmedia.co.uk
Advertising designer	Parvin Sepehr

INSERTS

Laurence Robertson	+353 (0)876 902208
--------------------	--------------------

CIRCULATION, MARKETING, PROMOTIONS, PRESS & PR

Newtrade manager	John Lawton
Subscriptions director	Jacky Perales-Morris
Direct marketing manager	Aimee Rhymmer
Buyer	Karen Flannigan
PR & Outreach Manager for Comms	Emma Cooney emma.cooney@ourmedia.co.uk

MANAGEMENT

Chief executive officer	Tom Bureau
Group managing director Our Media	Andy Marshall
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Head of brand marketing and brand lead	Rosa Sherwood

SYNDICATION & LICENSING

Director of licensing & syndication	Tim Hudson
-------------------------------------	------------

PRODUCTION

Production director	Sarah Powell
Group production manager	Louisa Molter
Senior production co-ordinator	Katty Skardon

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IT'S A FEELING

DIG IN

What's new, what's growing and what's going on this month

NEWS COMPILED BY MOLLY BLAIR



On Joe Perkins' award-winning garden, curved sculptures, made of stainless steel with a hemp rope, cut through the lush planting demonstrating the need to maintain the separation of the natural and man-made worlds.

DESIGN

Conservation champion

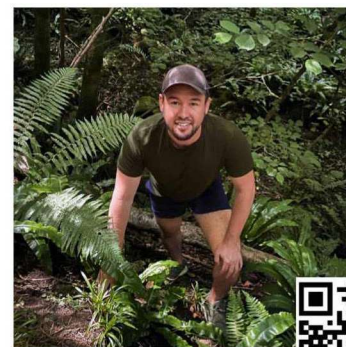
British garden designer Joe Perkins picked up the prestigious Horticultural Excellence Award at this year's Greater Bay Area Flower Show in the Chinese city of Shenzhen. "Conservation is a passion of mine," said Joe, whose garden, The Shenzhen City Garden – Community of Life, addressed the show's theme of conservation by drawing attention to the importance of the nearby mangrove forests. While these forests can absorb and store more carbon than tropical rainforests, in many parts of Asia they are being cleared at an alarming rate. Shenzhen, however, has been recognised as an international centre for their regeneration and preservation. Joe's plant-filled design featured a stylised river to reflect the merging waterways of the sediment-rich Pearl River

Delta, which supports Shenzhen's unique saline mangrove habitat, and a sculptural mangrove pavilion. Its colourful, lush planting was also a nod to Shenzhen's abundance of green spaces, which includes 950 public parks. joeperkinsdesign.com

HERITAGE

Missing links

National Plant Collections are a hugely important part of our plant heritage, preserving plants that might otherwise be lost to cultivation. Horticulture conservation charity Plant Heritage recently accredited its 700th such collection, but warns that there are still many plants in danger of disappearing from our gardens. In an attempt to find gardeners willing to take on a collection, the charity has launched its annual Missing Genera Campaign with a focus on pollinator-friendly plants, such as *Oenothera* (formerly *Gaura*). If you have a passion for a particular plant you'd love to help conserve, find out more at plantheritage.org.uk



Talking point

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Variegated *Hydrangea serrata* 'Gotemba Nishiki' may have been the runner up in this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show plant of the year award, but variegated plants still seem to divide the gardening world. In a recent episode of the *Gardens Illustrated* podcast *Talking Gardens*, ethnobotanist James Wong (above) didn't pull any punches. "They're absolutely terrible," he said. "When you make things variegated, they all look the same, whether it's an ivy or a really rare philodendron." Matthew Pottage, curator at RHS Garden Wisley, on the other hand, recently admitted he was a "massive fan" of variegation. Opinion among the *GI* team was also divided, with some thinking them fine in moderation while others agreed with James, which prompted us to canvas opinion more widely. The results surprised us. **To see the results of our poll, and discover what other experts think, scan the QR code above with your phone camera or visit gardensillustrated.com/variegation**

PLANT HERITAGE



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If you're looking for elegant ways to age your garden, Appley Hoare Antiques has opened a new shop in Tetbury, Gloucestershire, offering a wide range of antique garden furniture, pots and ornaments to give any space a vintage feel. Included are rare and unusual items of French, Swedish, Italian and Spanish origin. appleyhoare.com

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8 Christopher Lloyd Lecture

Christopher Lloyd's great nephew Chris gives this year's lecture, and shares memories of Christo and Great Dixter. Saturday 8 July, 6.30-9.30pm, £70. Great Dixter, Northiam, Rye, East Sussex TN31 6PH. Tel 01797 252878, greatdixter.co.uk



10 Summer Top Fruit Pruning

Join RHS Garden Bridgewater curator Marcus Chilton-Jones for a pruning workshop. Monday 10 July, 11am-1pm, £40. RHS Garden Bridgewater, Occupation Road, Worsley, Salford, Greater Manchester M28 2LJ. Tel 0161 503 6100, rhs.org.uk



23 Stitch in bloom:

Learn to create botanical embroidery on this three-day workshop with artist Lora Avedian. 23-25 July, 10.30am-4pm, £370. Botanical Brasserie Restaurant Courtyard, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, London TW9 3AE. Tel 020 8332 5655, kew.org

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OUT & ABOUT

Cultivating minds

Charleston, the East Sussex home of artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, was famously the country meeting place of the Bloomsbury Group. More recently its annual Festival of the Garden has brought together some of the most creative minds in gardening. This year's event (13-16 July) is no exception, with an eclectic mix of speakers that includes Tom Massey, Tayshan Hayden-Smith, Dan Pearson, Troy Scott Smith, Todd Langstaffe-Gowan, Advolly Richmond, Isabel Bannerman and Jimi Blake. Find full details at charleston.org.uk



TRUE COLOURS

A new, calming green chalk paint colour from Annie Sloan has been developed in collaboration with the RHS to bring the beauty of the English landscape indoors. Called Capability Green, with a nod to 'Capability' Brown, it costs £26.95 for a 1L tin. anniesloan.com

GARDEN

Lasting legacy

Back in 1973, Graham Robeson and Alan Gray bought East Ruston Old Vicarage on the north Norfolk coast, and over the past 50 years they have expanded its two-acre garden into 32 acres of magnificent garden rooms that include a box parterre, a gravel garden and a large woodland garden. The couple have now decided to leave both the house and garden to Perennial in their wills. The charity provides support and advice to those working in horticulture. It will become the charity's fifth garden. perennial.org.uk



3 FOR THE GARDEN...

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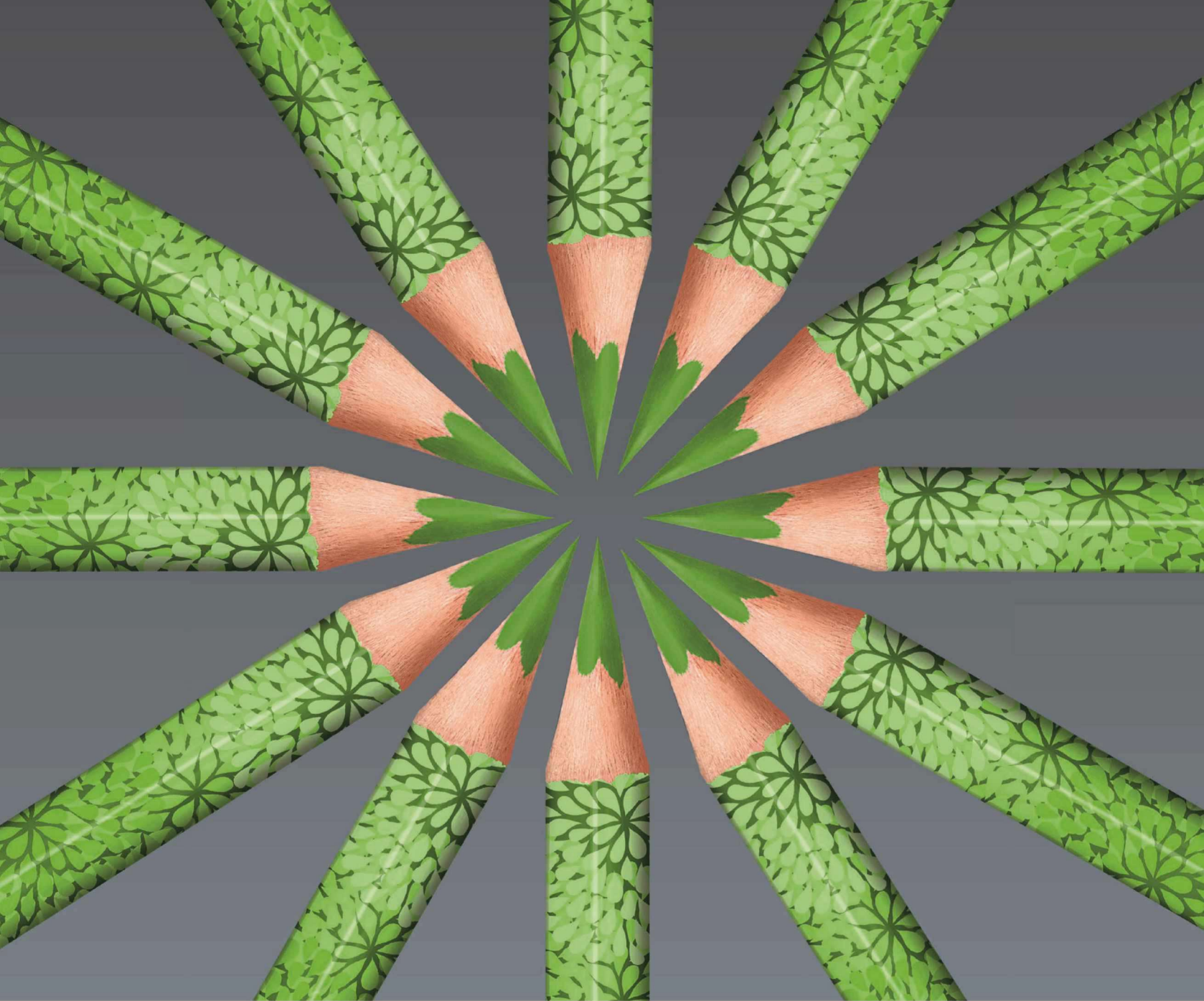


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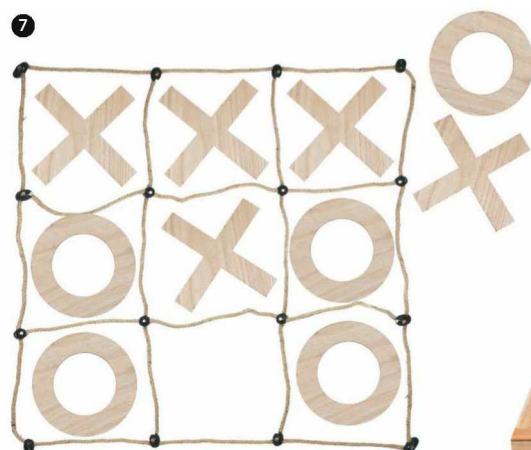
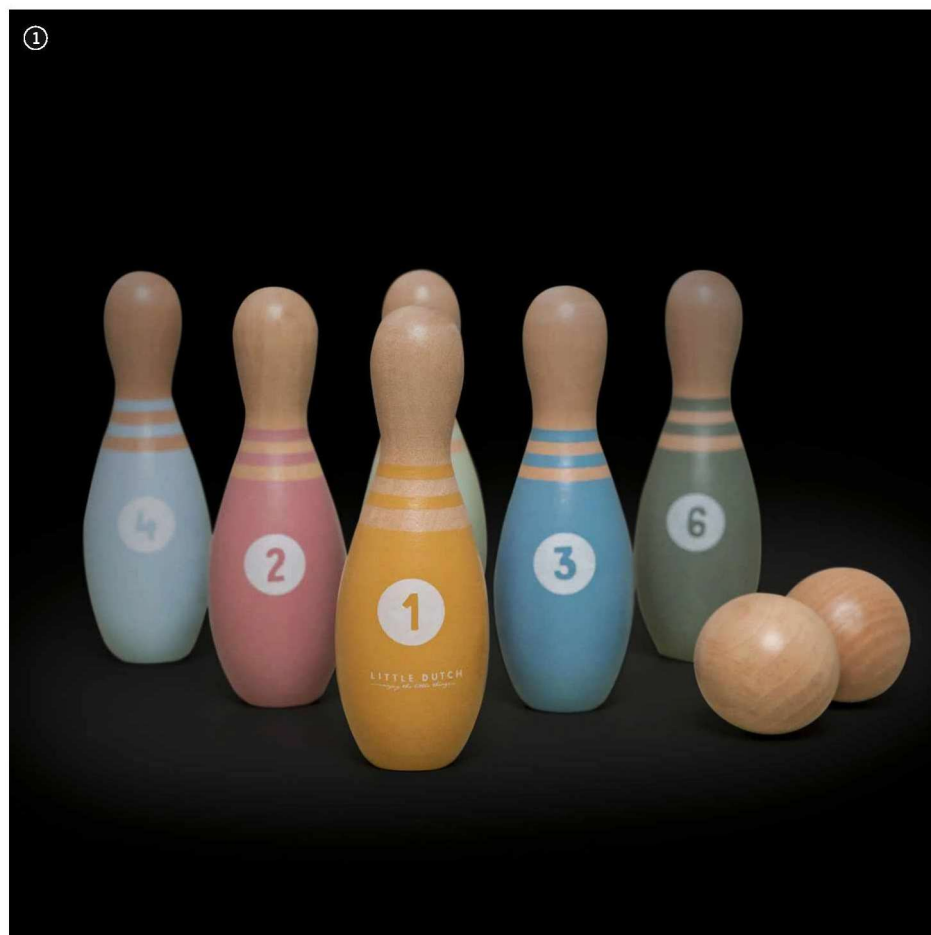
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COMPILED BY NIKI GOSS



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1. Little Dutch Bowling Set, £34.95, smallkins.com 2. Sumatra Falls RD Garden Shower, black, £339.99, blumfeldt.co.uk 3. Luxury 8 Boule Wooden Box Set, chrome steel, £74.99, jaqueslondon.co.uk
4. Foam Beach Bats, £38, 020 4524 2203, uk.sunnylife.com 5. Beosound A1 2nd Gen Waterproof Bluetooth speaker, anthracite oxygen, £239, 020 3769 0254, bang-olufsen.com 6. Geologic Breton Palet Game, £69.99, decathlon.co.uk 7. Noughts & Crosses Giant Garden Game, £22.99, 01276 583001, gingerray.co.uk



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This was Sylvia's promise to you...



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Stroke
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ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM
'LANSDORFERGLUT'

This is both vigorous and floriferous with us. Like many other achillea cultivars, the flowerheads change colour as they mature. Pale buds open to a vibrant shade of deep reddish-pink, then gradually fade to shades of peach and a dull cream. I love the multi-tone effect as new buds continue to open above the grey-green foliage. If deadheaded regularly, it will flower all summer. *Eryngium planum* 'Blaukappe' makes a terrific companion, as do *Allium sphaerocephalon* and *Salvia nemorosa*, all of which revel in the same light soil. AGM*.

Height and spread 80cm x 45cm.

Origin Garden (species North America, Europe, Asia).

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3a-9b†.

Season of interest June – August.



Åsa Gregers-Warg is head gardener at Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens in Essex bethchatto.co.uk

July plants

As temperatures begin to rise, Åsa Gregers-Warg is keeping things cool with delicate pinks, whites and blues, alongside a tall, dark and handsome aeonium and a statuesque fennel

PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD BLOOM



AEONIUM 'ZWARTKOP'

Each summer, we display Beth's collection of succulents outside the greenhouse where we overwinter tender plants. The dark, nearly black in strong sunlight, foliage of this cultivar – recently a star of Sarah Price's beautiful garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show – makes a wonderful contrast to silver-grey and pink succulents. With a tendency to become top-heavy, especially in spring when it produces large conical heads of bright-yellow flowers, it needs a sturdy clay pot. Easy to propagate by cutting off and rooting the tops, which encourages the plant to produce new rosettes. Water sparingly in winter. AGM.

Height and spread 1m x 50cm.

Origin Garden (species North Africa, Canary Islands).

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H1C.

Season of interest Year round.



VERBASCUM CHAIXII 'ALBUM'

This perennial mullein produces elegant, snowy spires studded with small, white, five-petalled blossom, adorned with purple filaments and bright-orange anthers. In our free-draining soil it self-seeds a little too happily, so we remove most of the seedheads, even though their silhouettes can add vertical interest in winter. Seedlings can easily be lifted and moved but, like other plants with tap roots, they don't like being transplanted at a later stage. The biennial *V. blattaria* f. *albiflorum*, with slender stems and flowers flushed pink, is a graceful alternative.

Height and spread 90cm x 45cm.

Origin Species Europe to western China.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun to partial shade.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

Season of interest June – August.



AGAPANTHUS 'ARDERNEI HYBRID'

The purple-tipped buds, dark anthers and pedicels contrast so well against the pure-white flowers. All our African lilies are grown in the ground, where they're neither watered nor fed. Poor flowering can often be the result of excessive nitrogen, which encourages overgrowth of the foliage, or not enough light. If grown in pots, they appreciate a potassium-rich feed twice a month, from spring until flowering, and will usually tell you when they've become too congested by throwing fewer flowers. After division they often need a couple of years to settle in.

Height and spread 1m x 80cm.

Origin Garden (species South Africa).

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 7a-10b.

Season of interest July – August.

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FERULA COMMUNIS

This ornamental fennel is a statuesque presence when in bloom, but also valued for its feathery skirt of intricately cut foliage (which dies back in summer) – a perfect foil for spring-flowering bulbs and the lime-green heads of *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*. The Tangier fennel, *Ferula tingitana* 'Cedric Morris', is much smaller in stature, only reaching a height of 1.5m and has attractive dark-green, glossy foliage. Perhaps the most elegant of the non-edible fennels is *Ferula glauca*, with its greyish-green foliage and purple-tinted stems. Ornamental fennels can take a couple of years for young plants to gather enough strength to flower.

Height and spread 2.5-4m x 1.2m.

Origin Southern Europe to Eurasia.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H3, USDA 4a-9b.

Season of interest June – July.



AMSONIA ORIENTALIS

Easy to grow, long lived and drought resistant, the Eastern bluestar and its relatives deserve a wider audience. Our visitors always stop to admire the star-shaped, pale-blue flowers, which are held in delicate clusters above the leaves. After flowering, the fresh-green, elliptic foliage makes a perfect foil for late-summer perennials. Will slowly increase in size without becoming invasive. We also grow *A. tabernaemontana* 'Blue Ice', a compact, spreading form that is ideal for the front of the border, where it produces a mass of pretty, periwinkle-blue flowers in summer.

Height and spread 50cm x 50cm.

Origin Greece, Turkey.

Conditions Most soils; full sun to partial shade.

Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 3a-9b.

Season of interest June – August.



CATANANCHE CAERULEA

As we move through high summer, even the most drought-resistant garden can struggle to maintain its early season vibrancy and lushness. As water becomes a more precious resource, we should perhaps look more to the Mediterranean landscape, which follows the natural rhythms and constraints of its climate, and allow our gardens to slow down and take a brief siesta. The vibrant, dark-eyed papery blooms of Cupid's dart are useful for bringing a splash of colour to the July border. A short-lived perennial, I add a generous scatter of seed in mid-spring to ensure a good display.

Height and spread 60cm x 30cm.

Origin Central Europe to western Mediterranean.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4a-7b.

Season of interest July – August.

Places to visit

Åsa's recommendations for places to see seasonal plants at their best

Be sure to check opening times. Some garden visits may need to be pre-booked

I first heard about the Silk Route Garden from Great Dixter's head gardener Fergus Garrett, who advised on the planting design. It is the latest addition to **Woolbeding Gardens**, a National Trust property in West Sussex that is home to Stewart Grimshaw. Stewart, together with his partner, the late philanthropist Simon Sainsbury, has transformed the 26-acre

garden with themed areas of abundant planting around the Georgian Grade I-listed house, and more relaxed, informal planting towards the outer perimeter. In the new Silk Route Garden, meandering paths weave through 12 key areas that exhibit the distinct flora of the ancient trading route, from Istanbul through mountainous regions and Persian

woodland to the foothills of Tibet and into China. It's the setting for a Heatherwick Studio-designed, kinetic glasshouse, which opens out into the shape of a flower. Open two days a week, reservations essential. Disabled parking only, but there is a complimentary minibus service from Grange Centre car park. Woolbeding Gardens, Midhurst, West

Sussex GU29 9RR. Tel 03442 491895, nationaltrust.org.uk

Last summer I had the opportunity to visit Laura and Jack Willgoss at **Wildegoose Nursery**, an independent nursery in the beautiful Shropshire countryside. Having fallen in love with what was a dilapidated walled garden, while on the lookout for a new home for their



BUDDLEJA CRISPA

We grow this lovely Central Asian butterfly bush as a wall shrub, trained against the south-facing wall of Beth's house, where it is protected from cold winds. In spring it's given a trim back to the woody framework. Racemes of small lavender flowers are produced in abundance during the summer months and often into autumn, if deadheaded regularly. The white, felted coating, which protects the stems and leaves from heat, intensifies in colour during periods of drought. It can reduce you to fits of coughing and wheezing, so make sure to wear a mask when pruning.

Height and spread 3m x 3m.

Origin Iran to China.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 6a-9b.

Season of interest June – August.



STIPA ICHU

The Peruvian feather grass is fairly recent addition to our Gravel Garden, where it forms narrow, upright clumps of finely textured, bright-green foliage. While *Stipa tenuissima* resembles a shock of blonde hair, this grass produces a mass of long, slender, slightly arching heads. I almost prefer them at this stage, with their silken sheen, gracefully dancing above the foliage in the lightest breeze. Having said that, in late summer their fluffy, white plumes look wonderful planted en masse. We also grow the slightly taller and airier *S. pseudoichu* as an accent plant elsewhere in the gardens. AGM.

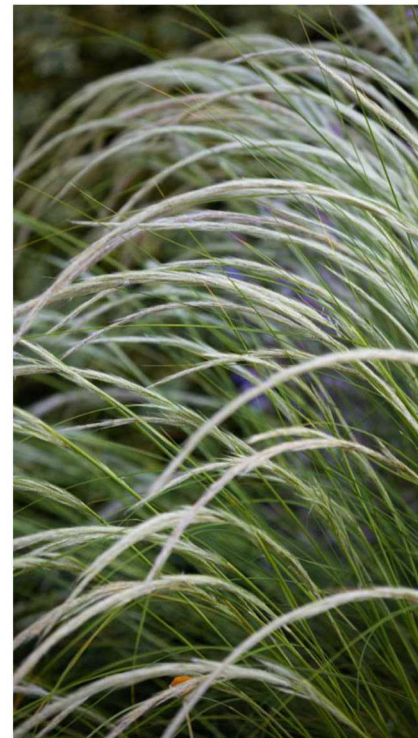
Height and spread 90cm x 30cm.

Origin Mexico to South America.

Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 7a-10b.

Season of interest July – October.



LYTHRUM SALICARIA 'BLUSH'

On sweltering hot days, our Water Garden offers the cool relief of lushness. In one corner, Beth planted this lovely form of purple loosestrife, furnished with softest rose-pink blooms from midsummer. Backlit by the sun, the tapering spires make a beautiful, vertical silhouette against a cloud of *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier', underplanted with *Betonica officinalis* 'Hummelo'. While many other loosestrifes self-seed prolifically, this cultivar has proven well-behaved here. A perennial clump former, we propagate it from cuttings in April or May. AGM.

Height and spread 1m x 50cm.

Origin Garden (species Europe, Asia, North Africa, Australasia).

Conditions Moisture-retentive soil; full sun.

Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-9b.

Season of interest July – August.

▷ nursery, the couple have spent the past ten years transforming the two-acre site from a wilderness into a thriving nursery, with a small sales area and garden, where they showcase many of the plants they sell, trial new plants and experiment with different plant combinations. Like us, they propagate their plants from stock grown on site. Once

inside the beautiful brick walls, it's like being transported into a different world. Tall perennials, annuals and grasses line the meandering paths, and you feel utterly immersed walking through the exuberant planting. Starting out as a specialist grower of violas, Wildegoose Nursery now offers an ever-increasing range of first-rate flowering perennials and

grasses. Wildegoose Nursery, Lower Millichope, The Walled Garden, Munslow, Shropshire SY7 9HE. Tel 01584 841890, wildegoosenursery.co.uk

It's been exciting to see Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson's original vision for the Delos Garden at Sissinghurst Castle come to life through the collaboration between head gardener Troy Scott

Smith and landscape designer Dan Pearson.

Having successfully emulated the atmosphere of the small, Aegean island, there are now plans to further expand the quarter-acre garden. Dan's palette of Mediterranean plants is refreshingly innovative and inspiring. I'm always on the lookout for new additions to add to our own drought-tolerant range,

so it's interesting to see how these plants respond to the British climate. Now in its third season, it is gardened with a gentle hand and I enjoy seeing how the plants have been allowed to spill over the edges, self-seed and make new little communities. Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Biddenden, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2AB. Tel 01580 710700, nationaltrust.org.uk



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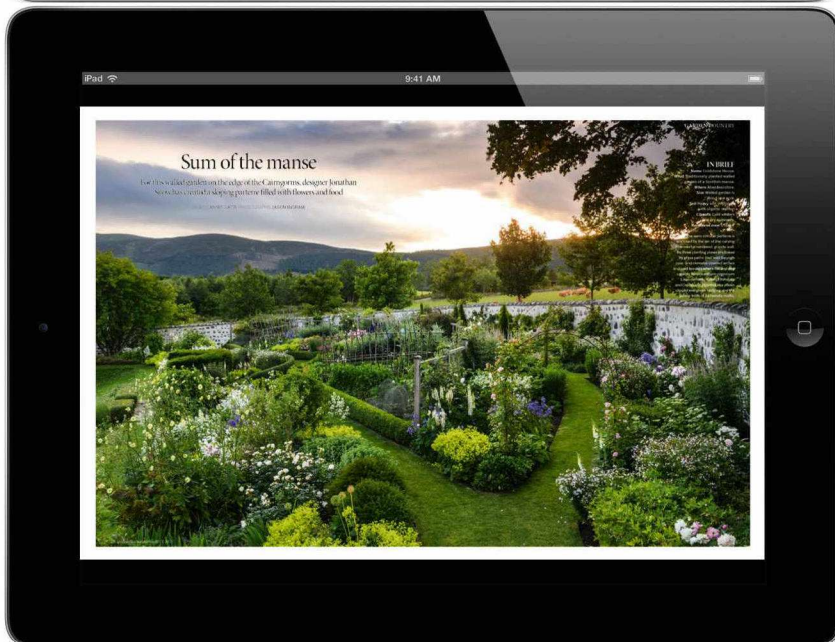
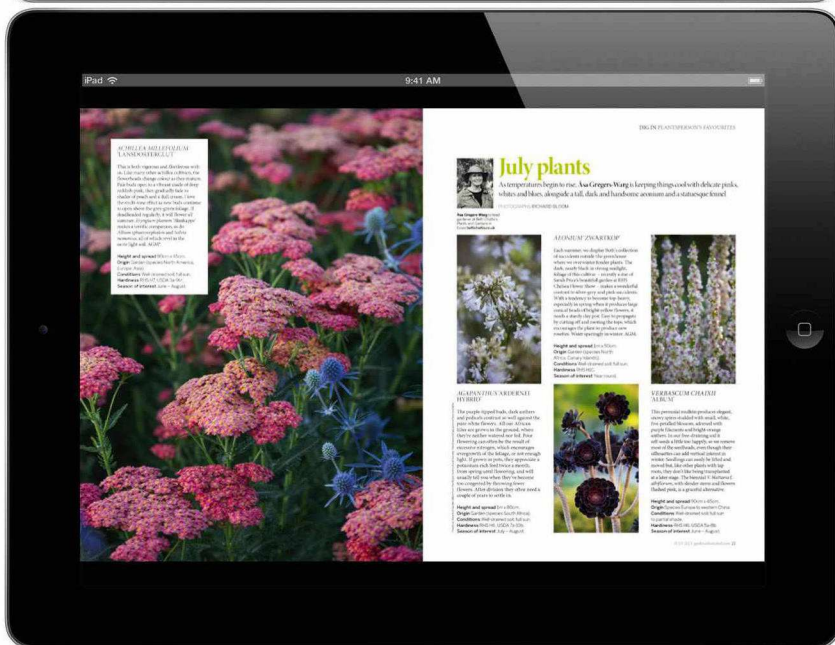
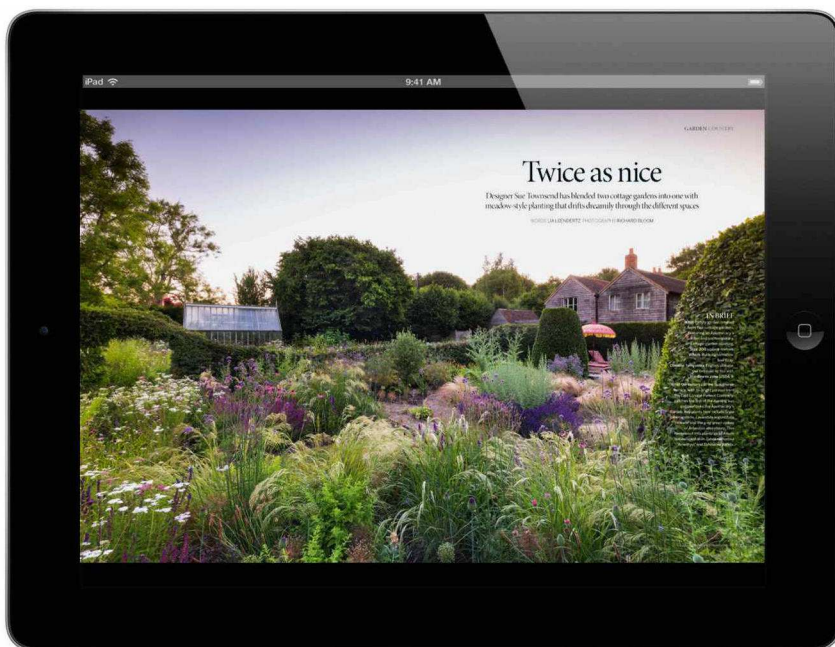
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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

If you've despaired of why botanists keep changing the names of your favourite plants, columnist

Ken Thompson explains the logic behind the taxonomic tinkering

ILLUSTRATION JILL CALDER

Gardeners, I think it's fair to say, have a fairly fraught relationship with plant taxonomy. Botanists want the way plants are classified and named to reflect our best understanding of their evolutionary relationships. Gardeners just wish they would leave well enough alone.

In recent years, the whole subject has been revolutionised, in part, by our ability to look directly at plant DNA, which has often revealed that some of our earlier ideas weren't quite right, and that plants' names need to change.

Aster

But change how? Sometimes we need new names, and a good example is *Aster*. When Carl Linnaeus was handing out our modern Latin binomial names, he picked the European aster as the 'type' species of his new *Aster* genus and called it *Aster amellus*.

Quite a few other European plants looked rather like the European aster, so these were added to the new genus. Later, botanists found an absolute cornucopia of asters in North America, including *Aster novi-belgii*, the ▷



▷ New York aster, and *Aster novae-angliae*, the New England aster. These two are the plants that are most often called Michaelmas daisies, and these days it's hard to imagine the autumn garden without them.

Aster just grew and grew, but suspicions developed that not all those plants belonged together, suspicions confirmed by the new DNA evidence in the mid-1990s.

Not only are the North American asters completely unrelated to the European ones, many of them aren't even closely related to each other. Soon species were being hived off into new genera, and most Michaelmas daisies ended up in the largest of these new genera: *Symphyotrichum*. Thus the New York and New England asters are now called *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii* and *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* respectively.

But recall that *amellus* defines the genus, so it and its relatives are unchanged, including the deservedly popular hybrid of *Aster amellus* and *Aster thomsonii*: *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch'.

Rosemary

Another common change is the loss of familiar names, usually because one genus is found to be embedded within another. One recent high-profile casualty of this is the fragrant culinary herb rosemary, which nicely illustrates the difficult decisions thrown up by the DNA evidence. The DNA tells you exactly how plants are related to each other, but it doesn't tell you how to turn that into a sensible list of names. There was always a good argument, purely on morphological grounds, for including *Rosmarinus* in *Salvia*, a view confirmed by the latest DNA evidence. So far so good, but now what?

Rosemary is in a branch of the *Salvia* family tree along with several other familiar salvias, including common sage, *Salvia officinalis*, and clary sage, *Salvia sclarea*. If you really wanted to, you could keep *Rosmarinus*, and those salvias, exactly as they are, but doing that would create another problem: salvias that are more closely related to rosemary than they are to each other (definitely not allowed).

And the only way out of that problem would be to invent a whole load of new genera for all the other salvias, such as the lovely Gentian sage *Salvia patens* and hundreds of others. Given that something had to change, botanists decided that *Rosmarinus* had to go, so while rosemary is still rosemary, its botanical name is now *Salvia rosmarinus*, and we're just going to have to get used to it.

Not only are the North American asters completely unrelated to the European ones, many of them aren't even closely related to each other. Soon species were being hived off into new genera

Pineapple guava

Once upon a time, there was an evergreen shrub with leaves densely felted with white hairs on the underside. Its unusual flowers, with fleshy crimson and white petals and a central bunch of long crimson stamens, open over a long period in June and July. In an exceptional summer, these might be followed by egg-shaped edible berries with an aromatic, guava-like flavour, hence its common name of pineapple guava. The plant comes from the highlands where Brazil meets Argentina and Paraguay, but is now a major fruit crop in New Zealand.

Long ago, pineapple guava was given the scientific name *Feijoa sellowiana*. Which is where it remained until the 1980s, when botanists noticed that it looked a lot like a related plant called *Acca lanuginosa*, and concluded that maybe the two genera should be united. *Acca lanuginosa* is the 'type' species of the genus *Acca*, so *Acca* had to stay and *Feijoa* had to go, and the plant became *Acca sellowiana*.

Gardeners were annoyed by the change, as usual, but had by now learned to be philosophical about botanists tinkering with Latin names. Fast forward to 2019, and a new team of botanists, armed with the latest DNA evidence, discovered that *Acca sellowiana* is not (however similar it may look) closely related to several Andean species of *Acca*, including *Acca lanuginosa*.

Acca lanuginosa remains the 'type' species of *Acca*, so *Acca sellowiana* had to once more pack its bags and go somewhere else. Accordingly, *Feijoa* was retrieved from the waste basket, and pineapple guava is once more *Feijoa sellowiana*.

In taxonomy, what goes around doesn't always come around, but sometimes it does, if only you're patient enough. Thus, anyone who stuck with Gertrude Jekyll's 'shrubby veronicas' was eventually rewarded when *Hebe* was abolished and the plants put back in *Veronica* where they belong.

And those of you with a pineapple guava adorned with a faded label saying *Feijoa sellowiana* can now be suitably smug that you never got around to replacing it. □

• Dr Ken Thompson is a plant ecologist and myth buster, who is known for his scientific and practical approach to gardening. He is author of books on invasive species, biodiversity, wildlife gardening, weeds and compost making.



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FAYE HOWELLS

As a gardener for the Community Grow project at RHS Garden Bridgewater, Faye wants everyone to grow something

PORTRAIT JASON INGRAM

Your career inspiration My mum. She was an amazing gardener and when she passed in 2009 I found solace in looking after the houseplants I'd inherited. I know she would be so proud of what I've achieved and how far I have come... I'm also holding her responsible for the houseplant addiction I now have.

Your journey to horticulture Before I started working for the RHS, I worked for a Local Authority for 13 years, covering Housing Advice and Homeless Prevention, with the last three years working with entrenched rough sleepers. While studying my RHS Level 2, I would encourage my accommodated clients to grow veg for their health and wellbeing. I began volunteering at Bridgewater in 2018 to gain more experience and finally took the leap of faith in 2020, securing a temporary position. I knew the site very well, having grown up only a mile away, and instantly knew I had made the right decision, especially when I gained my permanent position earlier this year.

Horticultural heroes Carol Klein: not just because this northern lass grew up down the road from me but because she made horticulture feel accessible to all. They say never meet your heroes but I'm very pleased I met mine; she is as lovely and down to earth in person as on screen.

Favourite landscapes I love natural landscapes and planting for nature. I love derelict areas that are rewilding themselves, showing the resilience of nature, the want and need to survive and even thrive no matter the conditions.

Favourite weed I wouldn't say horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) is my favourite weed but I've learned to tolerate it as I'm plagued by it at my allotment. It does have its uses though: bundles can be used for rubbing down and cleaning your tools and in a plant tonic it can prevent blackspot. Horsetail extract is also supposed to be good for healing wounds, bone health and strengthening hair and nails.

What principles have guided your attitude to gardening Gardening and horticulture really is for everyone. It doesn't matter where you live, what your background is – mansion or high-rise flat; if there is access to a light source then you can grow something there.

One thing to make your garden more sustainable Mulch! Mulch! It's been said before but healthy soil starts a healthy eco system that helps plants be more resilient, meaning less feeding, watering and weeding.

Gardening career aims At this point in my life I would say I have gained the career I set out to achieve. It hasn't been an easy road to get here – working, studying and volunteering while having two small children at home – but perseverance, a lot of hard work and amazing support from my husband, friends and family has got me here. Seeing how happy the community groups are when they see what they have grown, cooked and tasted – these are the little things that make this my dream job.

Contact fayehowells@rhs.org.uk

I love derelict areas that are
rewilding themselves, showing
the resilience of nature



Twice as nice

Designer Sue Townsend has blended two cottage gardens into one with meadow-style planting that drifts dreamily through the different spaces

WORDS LIA LEENDERTZ PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD BLOOM

IN BRIEF

What Family garden created from two cottage gardens, featuring an Apothecary's Garden and contemporary, cottage-garden planting. **Size** 300 square metres. **Where** Buckinghamshire.

Soil Clay.

Climate Temperate English climate, not too cold or too wet.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

What the owners call the Sundowner Terrace, with its bright parasol from the East London Parasol Company, catches the last of the evening sun and overlooks the Apothecary's Garden. Key plants here include *Stipa tenuissima*, *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' and the grey-green spikes of *Artemisia absinthium*. This merges out into plantings of *Allium sphaerocephalon*, *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' and *Echinacea pallida*.



You could be forgiven for thinking that you had walked into a particularly floriferous meadow throughout much of the garden that designer Sue Townsend has created in the Chilterns. This was entirely intentional. The garden was originally two separate cottage gardens, and part of Sue's brief was to make the two gardens blend together, as well as out into the surrounding countryside. "It is an amazing spot with hardly any houses around," says Sue. "To the front of the house is hazel woodland – you can hardly see the house from the road, it's like Hansel and Gretel – and to the back there are views over a paddock and trees in the distance. I wanted the garden to drift into the woodland and sit well in the landscape."

To this end, Sue has made extensive use of perennial meadow turf by Pictorial Meadows. The mix, called Purple Haze, includes salvias, achillea and oregano and is longer flowering than native meadows. It's not just at the meadowy edges of the garden, but drifts right through it, even lapping up against some of the garden's seating areas. The shades of purple and pink blend in with zones of more traditional perennial planting.

This slightly more structural planting surrounds the house and is what Sue calls

'contemporary cottage-garden' planting. "Cottage-garden planting can be wonderfully chaotic. Here we have some of that looseness but there is more rhythm and repetition to the planting."

Astrantia major 'Large White' has lovely cottage garden-style pincushion flowers that float above the borders and that mix beautifully with plants such as *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', which spills its aromatic foliage out and softens the brick paths with its contrasting soft-lilac spires. *Rosa Gertrude Jekyll* (= 'Ausbord') is planted in several places for scent and pops of bright, strong pink among the pastel shades.

Other plants are used for a woodland feel towards the wooded edges of the garden, alongside ferns and foxgloves. *Cenolophium denudatum* is a summer-flowering, white umbellifer that gives a vertical accent, lightness and a slightly wild feel to perennial plantings in dappled shade. *Acanthus mollis* was chosen for its strong spires of white flowers, 1.5m high. It has been planted beneath a huge magnolia tree near the house, where it creates a lush feel and bridges the gap between dappled shade and full sun.

All of this soft and slightly wild planting works so well here because Sue has used lots of strong structural evergreens, including clipped mounds of *Osmanthus*, *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Golf' ▶

To continue turn to page 40

Above Sue has used woodland planting and a romantic, cottage-garden scheme around a large, old magnolia close to the house. It sits alongside the family's terrace, with a long dining table from Oxenwood.

Right The use of grasses, including *Stipa calamagrostis*, in the Apothecary's Garden pulls the planting together but also gives interest throughout the winter months, when many of the other plants have died down. The planting in pastel colours, including *Echinops ritro* 'Veitch's Blue', *Agastache* 'Blackadder', *Eryngium x zabelii* 'Jos Eijking', *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and a silver-leaved young olive tree, was chosen for its calming effect. An outdoor sofa is the perfect place for the family and friends to gather.

We loved the idea of them
picking rosemary sprigs to
drop into their G&Ts while
watching the sun go down





Creating a wildlife-friendly meadow

The perennial meadow used by Sue throughout this garden is from a range by meadow company Pictorial Meadows, which was started by planting expert Nigel Dunnett, who is among those designing and continually improving the range of mixes. The aim is to create wildlife-friendly meadow mixes that are as colourful and long-flowering as more traditional ornamental planting, and provide pollen over a long period. The company has been successful in encouraging several local councils to start planting meadows as a low-maintenance and wildlife-friendly alternative to more traditional plantings and along road verges.

Sue chose a mix called Purple Haze in her clients' preferred cool colour palette of blues, purples and whites, and drifted it throughout the garden, tying its various areas together. The mix includes *Achillea millefolium*, *Aster amellus*, *Knautia arvensis*, *Centaurea nigra* and *Salvia nemorosa*.

These meadows can be sown as seed or laid as turf. Seed should be sown into well-prepared soil in early autumn or spring. The meadow will flower in its first year but will gradually improve over the following years. But for a quicker effect Sue chose to lay turf, which is packed with more mature plants and provides a more instant effect. Again, it can be laid in autumn or spring, but just like any other turf, it needs to be watered well and frequently, particularly if laid in spring, to prevent it from drying out.

Purple Haze responds well to an early summer cut, which encourages it to flower again later in the summer. It should then be left uncut for as long as possible into winter as it is a particularly good mix for providing seedheads that offer edible seeds for the birds throughout autumn and early winter. Find out more at pictorialmeadows.co.uk



▷ Ball' and *Carpinus betulus*. Sue and her clients decided to reduce the height and width of an overpowering yew hedge and revitalise old, tatty native hedges by engaging a local hedger to lay them in the traditional way, and create archways through to the kitchen garden and main lawn.

The Apothecary's Garden was built around 20 years ago, under the previous owners, and features a series of beds laid out in a petal-like brick structure. "We decided to keep it as a central feature and left the structure as it was," says Sue, "just replanting and repointing it where it was needed." The front of the cottages are red brick so Sue took inspiration from them for the rest of the garden's hard landscaping, creating the paths from similar red bricks laid in a herringbone pattern. The sides of the cottages are covered in local flint, and Sue chose reclaimed York stone for the seating areas to pick up its colour.

Much of the inspiration for the colours, planting and materials came directly from the clients, who put together a scrapbook of ideas and photographs of gardens they liked. The Apothecary's Garden gave Sue another opportunity to involve them in the development of the garden. Between them, they chose medicinal herbs that the family would use, including echinacea for colds and bugs, chicory for the digestive system, borage for premenstrual and menopause symptoms and lavender for its relaxing

properties. Because it was being planted during lockdown, Sue found it hard to get hold of some of the plants she needed, so she asked the family to grow them themselves. "I gave them a quick lesson in seed sowing, pricking out and potting on. They were a bit daunted at keeping them all alive, but up for it. It was a lovely way to have them involved in the making of the garden." *Stipa tenuissima* is the only non-medicinal plant in this area, but along with the lavender it helps to provide interest all winter, after the perennial plants have died down.

The Apothecary's Garden boasts one of the garden's many terraces, and Sue also included herbs that the family could pick and use as botanicals in their drinks when they were entertaining. "The owners are a very sociable family and we loved the idea of them picking rosemary sprigs to drop into their G&Ts while watching the sun go down. It has been a real joy to be able to create a garden that suits a family's needs so well, and that fits so well into the beautiful countryside around it – it's just a really nice place to be." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Sue's work at suetownsendgardendesign.co.uk

 Read how Sue revitalised this garden's hedges at gardensillustrated.com/hedges

Above The pergola seating area overlooks the kitchen garden and perennial meadow and is enclosed with soft, romantic, cottage-style planting with plenty of fragrance including roses and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*. Plants such as *Erigeron karvinskianus* spill over and soften the brick paths.

Right above The meadow planting runs right up to the kitchen garden and Alitex glasshouse. The aim is to encourage as many pollinators in as possible with the long-flowering season of the perennials, and also to blend this working area with the rest of the garden.

Right Creating different areas for the adults and younger folk to socialise – either together or with their own friends – was a key part of the brief. Here an informal firepit area allows everyone to enjoy time gazing up at the stars while cocooned by the hedges – both relaid native species and yew.



A photograph of a modern, two-story house with a black exterior and large glass windows. The house features a green roof with various plants and flowers. A concrete walkway leads from the foreground to the house. The background is filled with lush green trees and foliage. The overall scene is a blend of modern architecture and nature.

IN BRIEF

What Garden for contemporary house with green roofs and a woodland garden.

Where The Netherlands.

Size Four-fifths of an acre.

Soil Existing sand, compost-enriched for the woodland. Engineered soil substrate for the roof plantings.

Climate Maritime, temperate with occasional severe winter frosts.

Hardiness zone USDA 8a.

For this project in Zeeland, the Netherlands, Piet Oudolf worked closely with the architect, and fellow designer Tom de Witte, to create a series of three intensive green roofs, including this one on the garage building where perennials, such as *Eryngium bourgatii* and *Hylotelephium* 'Red Cauli', combine with grasses, including *Festuca amethystina* and *Festuca mairei*.

Balancing act

For this modern Dutch house, Piet Oudolf has combined richly planted roof gardens with the calm of a micro forest

WORDS TONY SPENCER PHOTOGRAPHS CLAIRE TAKACS

Perhaps it's the tidal pull of the nearby North Sea, but when you stand at ground level in this garden in Zeeland, the Netherlands, the entire house appears to be floating above its concrete base. This impression is only enhanced by a series of three green-roof gardens suspended above ground level. It turns out this floating illusion is entirely by design, in a split-level collaboration between Dutch architect Bart Vos and landscape designer Piet Oudolf, with logistical support from Dutch designer Tom de Witte.

The roof gardens came high on the client's original wishlist – designed for optimal viewing

from inside through the upper-storey bank of windows. Piet updated his essential matrix concept for the occasion in what he describes as “a complex matrix with everything repeating” to create a low shimmering haze of resilient perennials and grasses.

The plantings above are anchored at ground level by a mature woodland garden, which runs around two sides of this long and narrow property. This micro forest is yet another illusion, designed from scratch by Piet and comprised of massive specimens of hand-picked native and rare, exotic trees, underscored by layered woodland plantings, set along a curving gravel path. The cumulative effect is a meeting of two worlds. “It's one of the most beautiful private gardens I've done,” says Piet. “I could say the most beautiful in ➤

To continue turn to page 48



Mixed planting on one of the house's green roofs includes the steppe grass *Stipa barbata*, alongside the silvery plumes of *Salvia* 'Little Spire', while lilac drifts of *Allium* 'Summer Beauty' pair with the softening yellow of *Achillea* 'Moonshine' and the purple-spiked waves of *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Blauhügel'.



Roof gardens came high on the client's wishlist – designed for optimal viewing from inside through the windows

Top tips for creating a successful green roof

Dutch garden designer Tom de Witte shares essential advice for roof and podium planting

- **Before all else, consult a structural engineer** to ascertain the load-bearing capacity for a given roof structure. This determines the maximum depth of engineered soil substrate, allowing for rain saturation and drainage with a minimum two-degree slope.
- **What are termed 'extensive' roofs** have substrate depths of less than 15cm deep, which is better suited to simpler, low-maintenance plantings. This project has 'intensive' roofs with a more generous depth of 15-20cm, comprised of recycled brick, soil and lava rock. Greater depth allows far more planting options.
- **Green-roof systems typically consist of a multi-layered sandwich** of lightweight materials underpinned by an impermeable rubber membrane and protection layer for the roof. Next comes the drainage layer and filter sheet with the substrate on top. A good system uses recycled materials wherever possible.
- **Seek out drought-tolerant plants** adapted to thrive in dry, shallow soils with sharp drainage. Piet's choice of plants here are exposure and drought tolerant, but to help them establish, there is a dripline irrigation system, used twice a week for 30 minutes, in the early morning.



This section of the roof matrix planting includes drought-tolerant *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Blauhügel', *Achillea* 'Moonshine', *Stachys byzantina* 'Big Ears', *Eryngium bourgatii*, *Allium* 'Summer Beauty', *Limonium platyphyllum* and *Echinacea pallida* 'Hula Dancer', as well as *Salvia sclarea* var. *turkestaniana*, scattered single plants of *Salvia* 'Little Spire' and the steppe grass *Festuca mairei*.



Visitors to this modern house are welcomed at the front door by a gnarled, old *Acer palmatum* 'Dissectum', which is underplanted with *Rhododendron* 'Soir de Paris', *Geranium wallichianum* 'Buxton's Variety' and woodland ferns. The rectangular planting area is cut right through the concrete terrace to the soil below in exact proportion to the opening above for sunlight.

▷ balance and atmosphere, although it's one of the smallest too."

Architect Bart Vos encouraged his counterpart to take full creative licence in his design for the garden, and vice versa. As Piet puts it: "I don't tell the architect where to put the windows." Piet's design approach is rooted in pure practicality in terms of knowing what will work on the ground. "How people experience the garden is very important from Piet's perspective," says his collaborator Tom de Witte.

Piet starts by looking at access. Here, in the front garden, he used a staggered row of rectangular beech hedging as a privacy screen, to hide the swimming pool from the front walk and driveway. These are subtly complemented by the circular mound in

the grass to balance the design and inject "a note of mystery". According to Piet, these pure forms, such as the circle, the minimalist hedges and curving path have been part of his design language from the beginning.

Once Piet is satisfied with the masterplan, it is converted to an AutoCAD file to prepare it for the planting design. In this phase, Piet works solo in his Hummelo studio through a progression of colour-coded drawings, which show the precise position of each plant grouping and the number of plants used to fill each space. For this project Tom used this document to source and install the plants, a task he shared with Dutch designer Linda Lavoit.

Designing the woodland garden was another matter entirely. Piet is adamant that a plan is not ▷

A procession of clipped beech hedges shield the garden from the black garage and driveway. On the lawn by the swimming pool, a multi-stem *Cercidiphyllum japonica* is softened at its base by a mix of *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau', *Oenothera lindheimeri* and *Dianthus carthusianorum*.



A photograph of a modern garden. In the background, a large, mature tree with dense green foliage stands against a light sky. In the middle ground, a black building with a green roof is partially visible. The roof is covered with a variety of plants, including tall grasses and purple flowers. In front of the building, there are several manicured hedges and a variety of plants, including tall grasses and purple flowers. The foreground is a well-maintained green lawn. The text is overlaid on the lawn.

Piet estimated the number of trees and shrubs needed for the site, then invited the client and architect to tag tree selections at four nurseries

▷ enough. “You can’t put trees in the drawing, you have to be there,” he says. The Zeeland garden’s tree plan was created after the fact, not before. Still, there is a process in place. First, they estimated the number of trees and shrubs needed, and then invited the client and architect to tag tree selections at four different tree nurseries in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Piet notes their tree list was very special, acting on the client’s request to use the largest specimens available. Bigger trees include full-sized clumps of native beech and birch, as well as hand-picked specimens of *Acer palmatum*, each more than six metres tall and wide. The trees were craned into the garden, starting with the biggest first. Each was meticulously placed and then planted (by the nursery team) with a view to distribute the specimens to hit seasonal crescendos for peak flowering and autumn colour. Only then did they proceed with laying out

the perennial layers according to the planting design, tweaking where needed.

Tom has played a key supporting role to keep this project on track, part of a working relationship with Piet that now spans several years. He looked after many of the details vital to the project’s success – from implementing the planting to communicating with the clients. He keeps Piet up to date via video link to discuss the fine touches and details. His role continues into the aftercare, visiting the garden every month during the growing season, with a dedicated gardener now on-site two to three days a week. The lesson here is clear. To create a garden that floats, no matter how high, the practice and process of its making is down to earth. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Piet’s work at oudolf.com and discover more about Tom’s work at tomdewitte.nl



A multi-stem *Amelanchier x lamarckii* sits alongside the curving path through the micro forest. It is underplanted with *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*, *Geranium sanguineum* ‘Album’ and the grasses *Sesleria* ‘Greenlee’ and *Deschampsia cespitosa* ‘Goldtau’. The woodland continues right up to the house, with several multi-stemmed *Betula utilis* subsp. *jacquemontii* ‘Doorenbos’ set into the decking of the terrace. Each is fringed with *Hakonechloa macra*.



Each tree was meticulously
placed to distribute the
specimens to hit seasonal
crescendos for peak flowering

What A small genus of bulbous plants in the Iridaceae family, with brightly coloured flowers, usually red or orange, and upright, sword-shaped leaves. The eight species include *C. aurea*, *C. pottsii*, *C. masoniorum* and the semi-naturalised *C. paniculata*. They are commonly known as montbretia, falling stars and, in the USA, as coppertops.

Origins Southern and Eastern Africa.

Season Flowers between June and August, some lasting into September.

Size From 50cm to 1.8m tall.

Conditions Thrives in sunny situations in rich, well-drained soil.

Hardiness Some are hardy throughout the UK, but others will need winter protection. Most have an RHS hardiness rating of H4-H5, and are suitable for gardens in USDA zones 5a to 10b.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

†Hardiness ratings given where available.



CROCOSMIA

With their striking sword-like foliage and dazzling flowers, crocosmias bring a bright burst of high-summer colour to the garden

WORDS JOHN HOYLAND PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

***Crocosmia* 'Prince of Orange'**

Tightly packed along the stem, its glowing orange-red flowers have a ring of freckles at the base of the petals. Grown by the cut-flower industry for its long vase life and upright seedheads. Height and spread: 90cm x 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b†.

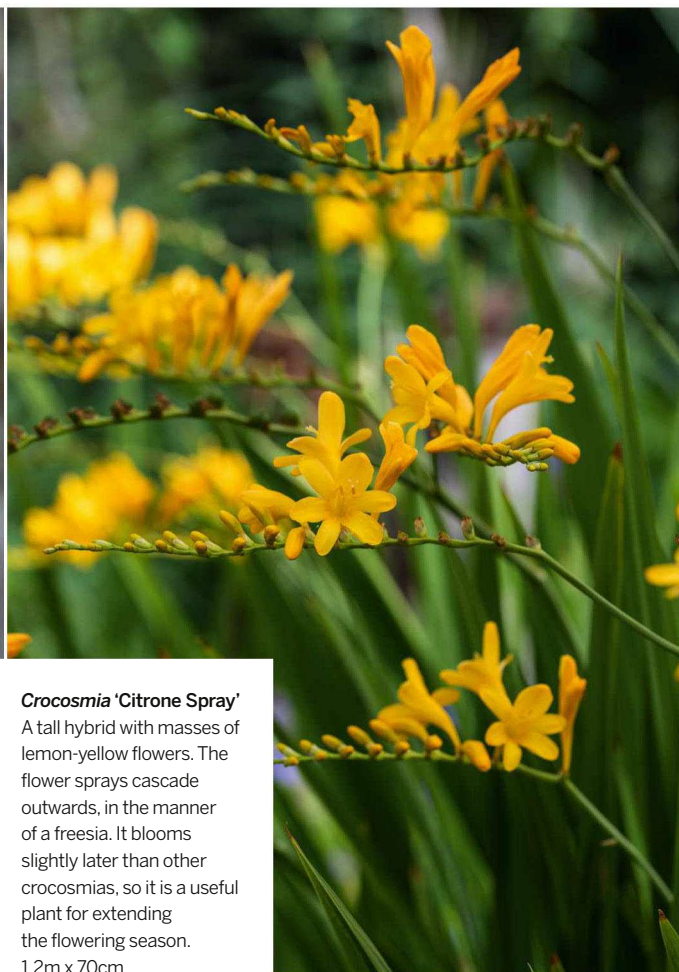
Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora
'Coleton Fishacre'

Vigorous and floriferous, flowering from mid-July until the end of August with luminous, apricot-yellow flowers. The dark-green leaves are overlaid with a bronze sheen to offset the flowers perfectly. 1m x 45cm. RHS H4, USDA 6a-9b.



***Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora* 'Columbus'**

Dark stems carry gold, purple-tinged buds that open to reveal orange-yellow flowers. Each petal's base is delicately marked with orange spots. Blooms from June to September. 75cm x 45cm. AGM*. RHS H4, USDA 6a-9b.



***Crocosmia* 'Citronne Spray'**

A tall hybrid with masses of lemon-yellow flowers. The flower sprays cascade outwards, in the manner of a freesia. It blooms slightly later than other crocosmias, so it is a useful plant for extending the flowering season. 1.2m x 70cm.

The fiery red and orange flowers of *Crocosmia* have been making a vibrant contribution to British gardens since they first started to appear in nurseries at the end of the 19th century. There are now hundreds of cultivars and hybrids, all descended from a handful of species. *Crocosmia* is a relatively small genus, with less than a dozen species native to southern and eastern Africa, where they are mainly found growing in open, moist grasslands and on forest margins.

Crocosmia aurea is the most widely known species and exhibits many of the qualities that make the genus attractive garden plants. The bright-green leaves appear in late spring, growing into spears over a metre tall, creating a bold, architectural effect. The arching flower stems are weighed down with star-shaped, orange flowers. Its cousin, *Crocosmia pottsii*, has similar foliage but with narrow, tubular flowers that often have a pinkish sheen.

These two species were used in France in the 1880s by the plant breeder Victor Lemoine to create a hybrid, *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora*, the forerunner of many cultivars and hybrids. Lemoine referred to his plant as 'montbretia', in honour of the extravagantly named French botanist Antoine-François-Ernest Coquebert de Montbret.

When montbretia arrived in Britain, it was popular with both gardeners and nurserymen. Easy to propagate and quick to flower, it was an immediate success. So

successful was it, that as early as 1911 there were reports of colonies of the plant in the wild. Anyone who has visited the lanes of Devon and Cornwall or the west of Ireland will be familiar with the dense clumps of bright foliage and sparkling orange flowers that out-compete native plants and destabilise the banks of streams. It is now illegal in the UK to introduce the plant into the wild or to dispose of it in public places. In Ireland, California and New Zealand, it is classified as an invasive weed. Although the name montbretia has long been abandoned by botanists and horticulturists, it is still in common usage, particularly to refer to the escapees.

Fortunately, nurseries and plant breeders have produced less thuggish *Crocosmia* hybrids and cultivars, which are just as striking as montbretia. These are vigorous and floriferous forms, with impressive, sword-like foliage and dazzling flowers, but they are not invasive. The first appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, when a Norfolk gardener named a cultivar with buttery yellow flowers for himself – *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora* 'George Davison'.

It and two of his other selections are still widely grown and prized for the number of flowers they produce. *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora* 'Star of the East' has soft orange flowers, while on *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora* 'Lady Hamilton' they are a deep apricot with burgundy freckles at the base of the petals.

It wasn't until the 1960s that interest in the genus was dramatically renewed ▷

To continue turn to page 59

The arching
flower stems are
weighed down
with star-shaped,
orange flowers



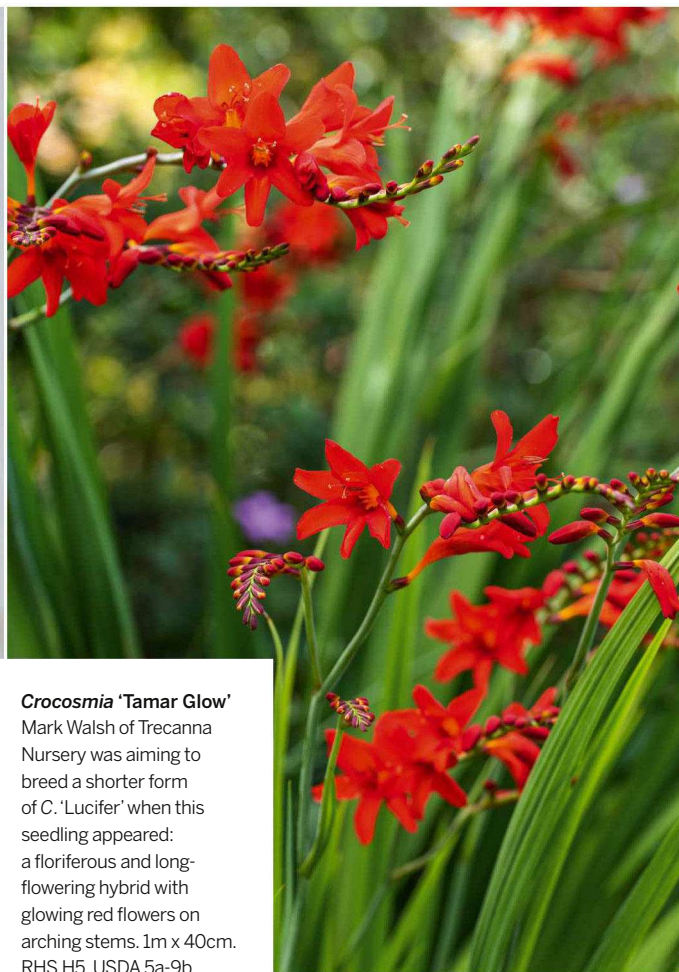
***Crocosmia* 'Bee's Delight'**

Introduced by Trecanna Nursery in 2022. Each stem carries around 20 luminous red flowers, which have golden centres. The flared flowers provide easy access for bees, hence the name. It will be a few years before this plant is widely available. 90cm x 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.



***Crocosmia pottsii*
'Culzean Pink'**

Delicate, tubular flowers that are 2cm long dangle sparsely from the upright stems. There's no genuinely pink *Crocosmia*, but this cultivar comes close, with pale-orange flowers that have a pinkish flush. 1m x 45cm. USDA 6a-9b.



***Crocosmia* 'Tamar Glow'**

Mark Walsh of Trecanna Nursery was aiming to breed a shorter form of *C. 'Lucifer'* when this seedling appeared: a floriferous and long-flowering hybrid with glowing red flowers on arching stems. 1m x 40cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-9b.

How to grow *Crocosmia*

- **Crocosmias prefer a warm, sunny position** in fertile, moist soil that doesn't become waterlogged. Cultivars of *Crocosmia pottsii* need a soil that doesn't dry out during summer. Most crocosmias will cope with a little light shade but their flowering will be less profuse.

- **Crocosmias are sold as both dormant corms** (that look similar to gladioli) or as growing plants. Corms should be planted in spring; plants growing in pots can be planted any time. Before planting, incorporate lots of organic material, such as garden compost or well-rotted manure, into the soil. Corms should be planted to around three or four times their depth.

- **As a rule of thumb, the more intense the colour of the flower**, the hardier the plant. Pale flowers, particularly pale yellows, tend to be tender. Hardy cultivars also tend to have smaller flowers.

- **In particularly cold gardens, it is advisable to cover the plant with a protective mulch.** In late autumn, cut the plant down to a few centimetres above the soil and cover with a layer of garden compost or other organic matter. Some gardeners in very cold areas dig up their plants after the first light frost and store the corms in a dry and frost-free place over winter. Although this is a palaver, it does ensure the plants' survival.

- **After three or four years, clumps of crocosmia will become congested**, reducing the number of flowers they produce. Sometimes, even, there is lots of foliage and no flowers. Digging up the plant will reveal long chains of fibrous corms. These are easy to twist apart to separate them from each other, saving the topmost corm to replant. The lower corms will eventually also produce flowers, but this may take a couple of years.

- **Taller cultivars will benefit from some form of discrete staking**, particularly in areas of high rainfall where heavy rains can topple the plants. Semi-circular hooped wire frames are ideal and should be put in place in spring. Crocosmias are not heavy-stemmed plants and often a few twiggy sticks will provide sufficient support.

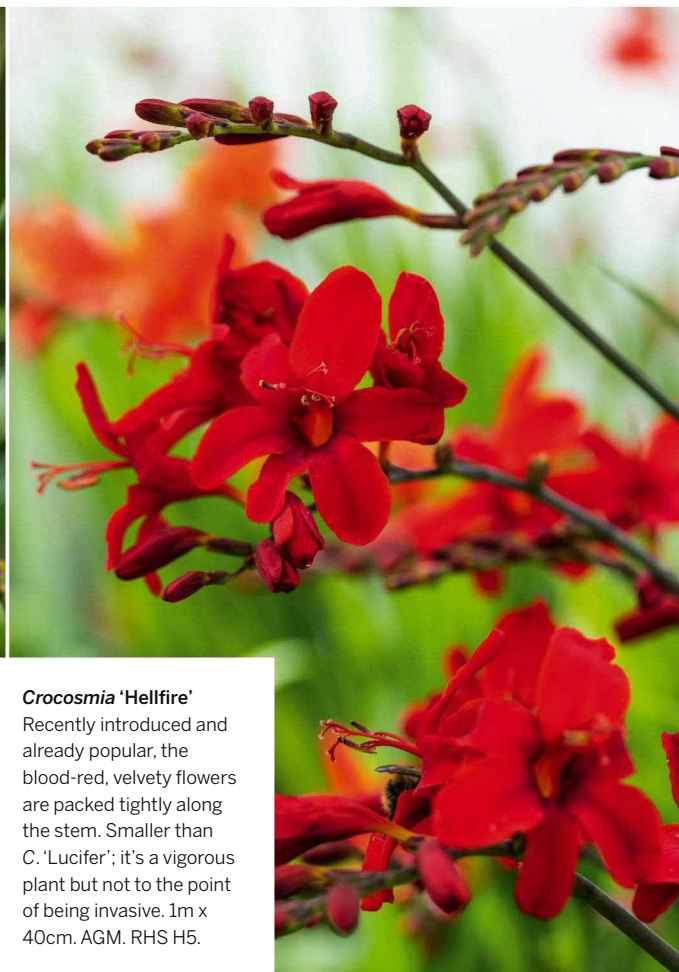
- **Do not put discarded corms on the compost heap** domestic heaps do not generate enough heat to destroy the plant and you will end up by spreading the crocosmia around the garden. The best way to dispose of them is to send them away in the green waste bin.

- **Crocosmias are not generally susceptible to pests and diseases.** In hot, dry summers they can be affected by red spider mite, which feeds on the sap in the foliage and causes mottling. Ensuring plants are well watered will help.



***Crocosmia* 'Limpopo'**

Its orange petals are overlaid with a pinkish hue. Long-flowering, vigorous and tough, which makes this a desirable hybrid. It has an upright habit with strong stems that do not need staking. 80cm x 40cm. AGM. RHS H5.



***Crocosmia* 'Hellfire'**

Recently introduced and already popular, the blood-red, velvety flowers are packed tightly along the stem. Smaller than *C.* 'Lucifer'; it's a vigorous plant but not to the point of being invasive. 1m x 40cm. AGM. RHS H5.



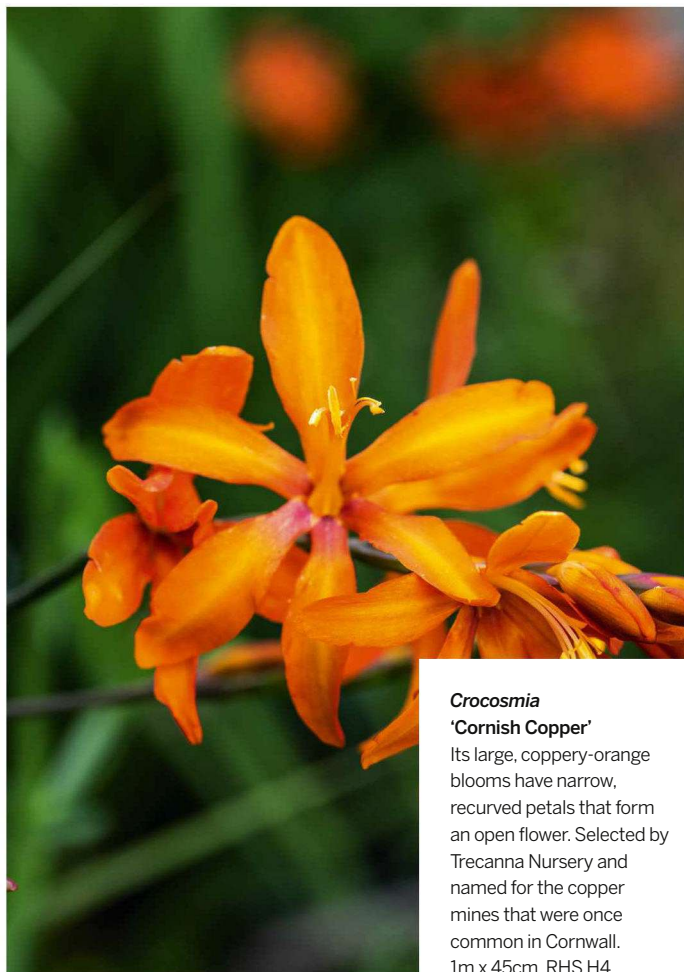
***Crocosmia* 'Lucifer'**

Bred in the late 1960s by Alan Bloom of Bressingham Gardens, this widely grown cultivar offers bright-vermillion flowers on tall, wiry stems for several weeks in July and August. 1.2m x 70cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 5a-9b.



***Crocosmia* 'Tamar New Dawn'**

An eye-catching hybrid with reflexed petals that are either yellow or orangey-red on the same flower, creating a bi-coloured effect. Selected and named by Trecanna Nursery. 70cm x 45cm.



***Crocosmia*
'Cornish Copper'**

Its large, coppery-orange blooms have narrow, recurved petals that form an open flower. Selected by Trecanna Nursery and named for the copper mines that were once common in Cornwall. 1m x 45cm. RHS H4.



***Crocosmia* 'Zeal Giant'**

As its name suggests, this is the big boy of the family, with flower stems that can reach 1.8m tall on rich soil. The stems are flushed with purple and arch to show off the sprays of upright salmon-orange flowers. 1.8m x 90cm. AGM. RHS H4.

▷ when another Norfolk nurseryman, Alan Bloom, introduced *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer'. It is an eye-catching hybrid with upright pleated leaves and sprays of luminous scarlet flowers in late summer, electrifying borders when most other herbaceous plants are beginning to look tired. The plant was an immediate hit with gardeners and continues to be the most widely grown crocosmia.

The position of *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer' as the gardener's favourite is being challenged by a new wave of crocosmias from enthusiasts and nurseries. Amateur breeder Paul Lewis has introduced a group of long-flowering hybrids named, in a nod to the origins of the genus, after three African rivers: the Limpopo, the Okavango and the Zambezi. One of his more recent creations, *Crocosmia* 'Hellfire', has blood-red flowers and is described in several plant catalogues as an all-round improvement on *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer'.

Crocosmia is ideally suited to the warmth and wet of southwest England and, in Cornwall, nurseryman Mark Walsh has an impressive collection of them. Mark has been growing South African plants for more than 25 years and is a respected breeder of crocosmias. The ones that make it through a long and rigorous selection process are given names that reflect their Cornish or Tamar Valley heritage. One of his selections, *Crocosmia* 'Tamar Double Red', is unusual in having up to

Crocosmia 'Lucifer' was an immediate hit and continues to be the most widely grown crocosmia

14 petals per flower. It stood out at the RHS *Crocosmia* trial in 2021 and received an Award of Garden Merit.

Crocosmias are flamboyant plants best suited to exuberant borders and planting schemes. While they can provide a counterpoint to demure, pastel-coloured plants, they look their best when accompanied by other hot and intense colours. Always plant them in large groups or in broad swathes. The plants are used most spectacularly at

Durnamuck Garden in Scotland, where the slopes of a high mound are covered in red cultivars, with orange ones at the peak, looking like an erupting volcano. Planting on such a grand scale might not suit everyone, but most gardens will be lit up by the addition of a few groups of crocosmias. □

John Hoyland is a plantsman and garden writer.

Where to see and buy

- **Beth Chatto's Plants & Gardens** Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex CO7 7DB. Tel 01206 822007, bethchatto.co.uk
- **Farmyard Nurseries** Dol Llan Road, Llandysul, Carmarthenshire SA44 4RL. Tel 01559 363389, farmyardnurseries.co.uk
- **Trecanna Nursery** The Old Barn, Chilsworthy, Cornwall PL18 9PB. Tel 01822 834680, trecanna.com



IN BRIEF

Name Ivy Cottage.

What Designer Chris Moss's private, naturalistic cottage garden with contemporary-style planting.

Where West Sussex.

Size Front garden of 144 square metres (12m x 12m) and rear garden of 240 square metres (12m x 20m).

Soil Heavy clay, enriched over many years by continuous cultivation.

Climate Temperate, east-facing front garden and west-facing rear garden.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Chris's garden is designed to feel entirely naturalistic, with nothing to jar the eye. Whites and pinks predominate in the front garden with *Erigeron annuus*, *Cenolophium denudatum*, *Ammi majus* and *Dianthus carthusianorum*. A *Crataegus coccinea* and mounds of *Osmanthus* provide structure.

Where the wild things are

In rural West Sussex, Chris Moss has created a sustainable, rustic-chic garden that hums with wildlife and shimmers subtly with modern cottage-style planting

WORDS PAULA McWATERS PHOTOGRAPHS ÉVA NÉMETH



Above *Sanguisorba tenuifolia* var. *alba*, with its white tassel flowers, stands 1.2m high and blooms all summer, holding itself up so well that it rarely needs staking. Here, its flowers dangle above the seedheads of *Cenolophium denudatum*, a white summer-flowering umbellifer that is a great favourite of Chris's.

Left Tall fleabane (*Erigeron annuus*) flanks the brick path to the front door and grows to shoulder height by midsummer, appearing to envelope the cottage in planting. A multi-stemmed *Malus toringo* tree has been planted beside the front gate, and there is also a topiarised beech tree surrounded by meadow planting near the entrance.



When you live in a chocolate-box country cottage, there is something of an imperative to create a suitably picturesque garden to complement it. But if you are a well-established garden designer and avid plant collector who is creating their own private garden, there are other priorities at play, too, such as having a place to experiment, creating a tranquil bolt hole and avoiding cliché.

Landscape designer Chris Moss arrived at Ivy Cottage four years ago. Its position is delightfully rural, backing on to ancient woodland that is part of Ebernoe Common, managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, and the immediate area hums with insects and wildlife, including nightingales, goldcrests, buzzards, countless bats and even glowworms. Built in 1780, the pretty tile-hung cottage is diminutive in scale, so Chris's aim has been to literally "engulf it in plants".

"As the summer progresses the planting gets higher and higher," he says. "I plant very densely so the need to weed is largely dispensed with." This is a rented property (Chris rents it from a client who is happy to give him free rein), so hard landscaping has purposefully been kept simple. A gently curving path made of locally made bricks, left unpointed, runs between several planting beds to the front porch.

There are four of these beds, set into grass. "I planned the first two by the gate to feel as though you are approaching the cottage through a meadow. Initially, I put in plug plants of natives including common yarrow, lesser knapweed, ox-eye daisies and field scabious. They're designed to be mowable at the end of the season and they have a loose, informal feel to them."

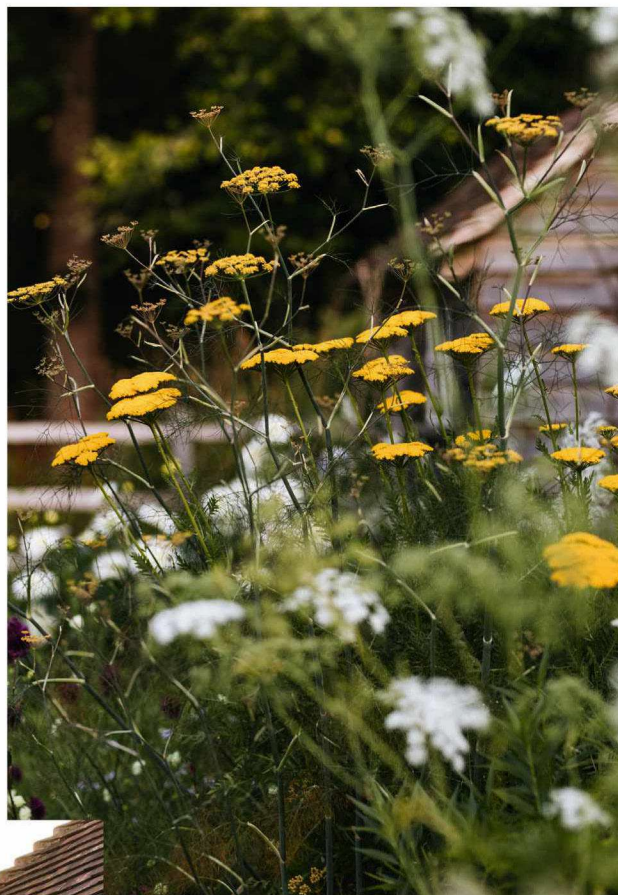
Nearer the house, the beds are frothy and billowing. Tall *Erigeron annuus* lines the path either side and mingles with *Ammi majus*, *Cenolophium denudatum*, white sanguisorba and magenta-pink *Dianthus carthusianorum*. None are deadheaded, so the effect of the seedheads is long lasting and romantic. Chris's discerning plant choices give it an edge over more traditional cottage-garden planting such as ▷

Above In the west-facing back garden, two long beds are cut through with a brick path and a narrow strip of mown grass. The plants knit together, holding each other up, so they need very little weeding or staking. Blue campanula, *Allium sphaerocephalon* and grasses dominate on one side while *Achillea filipendulina* 'Gold Plate' adds colour to the opposite bed.

Right The terrace is two steps lower than the garden to create a sense of enclosure. It has been paved with reclaimed York stone, which Chris has left unpointed so that plants such as *Scabiosa columbaria* subsp. *ochroleuca* and Welsh poppies can self-seed in the joints. The garden table is made from scaffold boards.

Chris's advice on creating a modern cottage garden

- **Look for perennials that give you the longest possible season** of interest, be it through flower or foliage, such as amsonias, rodgersias, actaeas and verbenas.
- **Minimal hard landscaping** will allow your plant choices to speak for themselves.
- **Use reclaimed and locally sourced materials** where possible, to echo the vernacular architecture.
- **Provide some year-round structure** with trees and evergreen shrubs to 'hold' the more ephemeral planting.
- **Choose self-seeders** to give a naturalistic look relatively quickly, such as scabious and fleabane.
- **Frame the garden** with cloud-pruned deciduous hedges in beech and mixed native species to provide good cover for birds.



Above The yellow umbels of *Achillea filipendulina* 'Gold Plate' and bronze fennel both inject energy into the back garden. Chris is keen to demonstrate how effective yellow can look in a scheme.

Below By midsummer the plants in the beds outside the sitting room are shoulder high. "When everything is so full and tall, you can literally lose yourself in the plants," says Chris. *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Fat Domino' is a stalwart here, as is *Euphorbia schillingii*, which brings a zing to any shady area.





▷ hollyhocks and lavender. Structure comes in the form of carefully selected trees and shrubs. *Osmanthus* mounds sit beneath a multi-stemmed hawthorn, *Crataegus coccinea*, which offers white blossom in spring and large berries in autumn. There is also a bay ball by the house, and in the back garden he has planted three multi-stemmed hornbeams to reflect the native woodland just beyond the back gate.

Behind the house, in the back garden, doors from the sitting room give out on to a York-stone terrace. In the shadiest part, Chris has planted a favourite plant, *Euphorbia schillingii*, alongside *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Fat Domino' – a dynamic combination that works well. Up a couple of steps, local brick has been used again to create a path that lines up with the kitchen window, creating a view through Chris's flowerbeds to the woods beyond the garden. These borders are packed full of interesting plant selections. "In the front I have concentrated on whites, blues and quite a lot of pinks," says Chris, "but in the back I felt I could inject more energy." He finds many of his clients are unwilling to countenance yellow, but here he is out to show how well it can perform. *Achillea filipendulina* 'Gold Plate' provides pops of colour, as do the yellow umbels of purple fennel.

Umbels are a staple throughout the garden, and Chris loves them so much he has found a way to have a succession of them from May to the end of summer, starting with the much-loved, dark-leaved *Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing' (as well as cow parsley blown in from across the lane), *Cenolophium denudatum* and *Ammi majus*, then progressing through purple fennel, giant hog fennel (*Peucedanum verticillare*) and creamy white milk parsley (*Selinum wallichianum*).

Chris's plant choices have been influenced by the naturalistic movement led by Piet Oudolf, and he has travelled many times to Piet's own garden in Hummelo to study his work. "The style and evolution of this garden are driven by ecology and sustainability," says Chris. "My priority is wildlife. Fortunately, it is abundant around here and now, with all these plants in the garden, it is always full of birds, butterflies and bees." His neighbours keep honey bees, so he is providing plenty of nectar and pollen for them.

In many ways, this garden, nestled in woodland, embodies Chris's design philosophy. His trademark style is quiet, intuitive design with a fresh contemporary approach, and here it is writ large. □

Above Chris designed the potting shed to look in keeping with the cottage and its woodland setting. "I spend a lot of time at my kitchen window gazing down this path," he says. The borders feature blue *Campanula lactiflora* 'Prichard's Variety', *Knautia arvensis* and *Allium sphaerocephalon*, and by the shed the tall white *Dahlia* 'My Love'.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Chris's work at chrismossgardens.com



8 modern-cottage plants

1 *Kalimeris incisa* 'Charlotte' A great little plant for the front of a sunny border, this Japanese aster, smothered with cheerful, palest lilac-white daisies, starts blooming in June and goes on until October. Height and spread: 60cm x 30cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b†.

2 *Dianthus carthusianorum* This clump-forming pink produces airy stems of vibrant magenta-pink flowers above grassy green foliage, and works beautifully as an accent among grasses and other perennials, such as *Sanguisorba* 'Tanna'. 40cm x 25cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.

3 *Campanula lactiflora* 'Prichard's Variety' A sought-after form, much-loved by bees, this milky bellflower is useful for adding height to a border, creating a show with its clusters of violet-blue flowers from midsummer onwards. 1m x 60cm. AGM*. RHS H7, USDA 3a-9b.

4 *Erigeron annuus* Although short-lived, this tall fleabane is invaluable for knitting together a perennial planting scheme. It has a profusion of dainty white daisies on long stems and self-seeds readily. 1m x 60cm. RHS H6, USDA 2a-7b.

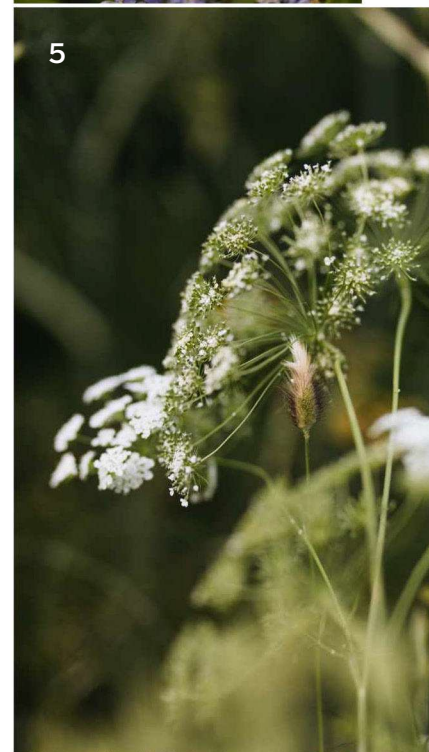
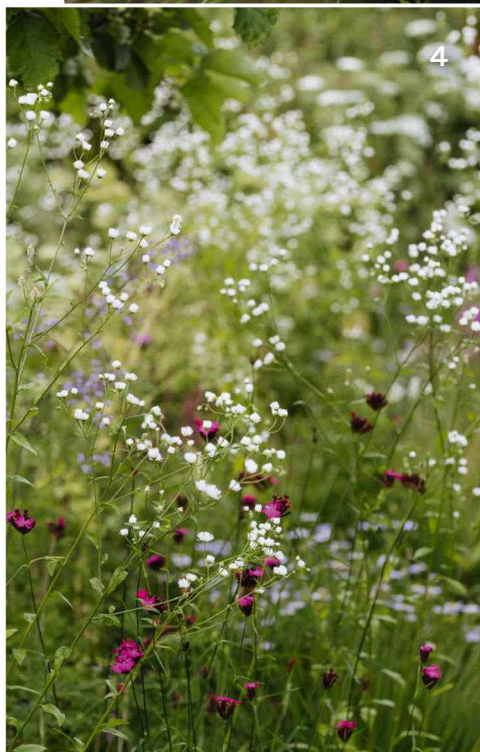
5 *Ammi majus* This hardy annual's billowing white flowers are a staple in any cottage-garden scheme, their cloud-like heads popping up through surrounding perennials. 1m x 50cm. AGM. RHS H6.

6 *Scabiosa columbaria* subsp. *ochroleuca* The pale lemon-yellow pincushion flowers of this clump-forming perennial seem to hover on their slender stems, creating a pretty, delicate effect. 60cm x 40cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

7 *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Fat Domino' Perfect grown in a partially shaded area with euphorbia, this upright, free-flowering persicaria is a beacon for bees. 90cm x 75cm. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.

8 *Euphorbia schillingii* Appearing in July and August, this robust euphorbia has tall erect stems and its flowers provide a pop of lime-yellow that will light up partial shade. 90cm x 50cm. AGM. RHS H5.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
†Hardiness ratings given where available.



HELENA PETTIT

The high-octane karate kid who is shaking up RHS Shows on her life as bouncer, staying calm in a crisis and engaging children and new entrants to gardening

WORDS AMBRA EDWARDS PORTRAIT ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Helena Pettit is the kind of woman who makes ordinary mortals seem a tad underpowered. For a spot of relaxation after a busy show season, she chooses a 100km kayak trip up the coast of Norway, beaching her craft and wild camping by night. Her garden in Kent, she confesses, is often a little neglected, as she spends so many weekends away, hiking with a band of equally energetic and outdoorsy friends. She is a second degree Dan black belt in Kyokushinkai karate – retired, she hastens to point out, although she used to fight for the Great Britain squad in her youth (she says it wistfully, although she is only in her forties – a mere stripling in the world of gardening). She has faced off attackers in dodgy nightclubs (no doubt in high heels – Helena is exceptionally glamorous), and trekked through the Andes in Peru. Yet she considers herself the least adventurous in her family: her brother ran off at 17 to join the French Foreign Legion.

Her mum, who disapproved of all that fighting, is delighted to see her tomboy daughter end up with a nice ladylike job – first as director of shows at the RHS, then in 2020 adding the Society's five gardens and retail to her portfolio. She is shortly to hand over responsibility for the gardens as she takes on a new role, as director of commercial and innovation, and can barely contain her anticipation.

"The opportunities for doing new things are so exciting. At a certain level, you see things that people don't always see when they are so closely involved with the subject matter, so you can spot the opportunities, perhaps because you are not so wedded to the ways that things have always been done. And once I see a new direction, I really enjoy investigating what it could bring to support the RHS. It's great to embrace change: I believe, where there's a will there's a way."

Helena has always had a prodigious energy. Her first job was working for champagne house Moët & Chandon by day, while working as a bouncer and teaching karate by night. She went on to build a career in marketing and event planning, working in a variety of sporting arenas from motor sport to the Horse of the Year Show. For a decade she ran the Grandstand Group, whose interests included NAEC Stoneleigh, the Warwickshire showground famous as the site of the former Royal Show and more recently various other agricultural shows. (There are, it turns out, an extraordinary number of synergies between the Grassland & Muck Show and the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.)

"But you reach that age," she explains, "when you think it would be really lovely to go and do something that would increase

the income for a charity that does great work." So when the role came up at the RHS, she jumped at it.

She didn't, she confesses, really expect to get the job, expecting her lack of horticultural knowledge to stand in her way. "But I knew I could learn what I needed to about the horticultural side." Helena is a great believer in lifelong learning, with a wide range of interests from natural history to digital transformation in business. (Though quite how she manages to fit education courses into her busy schedule is a matter of wonder.)

The challenge, when it came, was nothing to do with horticulture: Helena had barely got her feet under the table when the coronavirus pandemic struck in the spring of 2020, and the entire show schedule went up in smoke. But in a career in events management, she says, you get used to dealing with crises. She ascribes her unflappability to her years as a female bouncer, working in night clubs where her male colleagues wore stab vests.

"It gives you the confidence to deal with all manner of situations: you get used to just facing into challenges. There isn't much that fazes me, and sometimes maybe I should be fazed more, but I firmly believe that there's always a way through whatever is facing you. And the team at the RHS is amazing."

It's not always a picnic. She is used to coping with emergencies from gas leaks to sudden deaths, but there's not much she can do about the weather: the unceasing rain that turned Hampton Court 2021 into a mud bath (with not a bag of bark to be had anywhere in post-Covid Britain), even a tornado over Tatton Park. But the successes more than make up for it: hugely popular

new show categories such as the House Plant Studios, and Balcony and Container Gardens at Chelsea; and initiatives to support the nursery trade and tempt them back to the shows, and to engage children and new entrants to gardening. She is especially proud of a new access scheme to allow those on Pension Credit or Universal Credit to visit RHS gardens for just £1. Next year will see the launch of new shows, including a major indoor Urban Garden show in Manchester. And she has one more exciting announcement to make: the launch of the first RHS store on the high street in October. There will be houseplants galore, workshops and expert advice. Predictably, she just can't wait to see it. □

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USEFUL INFORMATION

The RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival takes place 4-9 July 2023, with a theme of gardening for resilience. Find full details at rhs.org.uk/shows-events





Picture this

Drawing on the wildflowers she loved as a child, Margarida Maia has created a garden in central Portugal that is now an Instagram sensation

WORDS NOEL KINGSBURY PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

IN BRIEF

What Private garden with a naturalistic planting style.

Where Central Portugal.

Size 4,000 square metres.

Soil Alkaline clay.

Climate Mediterranean with cool, wet winters and hot dry summers.

Hardiness rating USDA Zone 9.

A row of Italian cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens* 'Stricta') adds a classic Mediterranean feel to Margarida Maia's Portuguese garden. These sit in contrast to the wilder plantings on either side of this gravel path, where *Verbena bonariensis* self-seeds freely among a range of grasses and summer-flowering perennials, creating an atmosphere of spontaneity.

The Ribatejo region of Portugal is a landscape of gently rolling hills, fields, small farms, eucalyptus plantations and occasional patches of wilder landscape. High on a hilltop, some way from the nearest village, is the home of retired paediatrician Margarida Maia and her husband António, a cartoonist for the Portuguese daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã*. Here, Margarida has created a garden that is fast becoming something of a social-media sensation.

Margarida is very much an accidental gardener. With little gardening background, she only started making a garden here in 2017 because her son was getting married. “I wanted to have the celebration at our house,” she explains. “And I wanted to make a garden for that event. That’s how I got started.” Pleased with the results, she began to take rather lovely pictures of her garden on her phone, and to post them on Instagram. Gradually, over time, her garden images received more and more views, and she got more and more followers, until before long she had an audience in the tens of thousands.

Six years on, her early plantings are now maturing as solid and nicely integrated clumps of agapanthus, rosemary, *Teucrium fruticans* and, sprawling out below, the silvery foliage of *Arctotis*. It’s a resilient, low-maintenance combination, ideal for a Mediterranean climate where summers are hot and dry, and the rainy season of September to May is increasingly unreliable.

The bulk of the garden is at the rear of the house – a lawn surrounded by extensive areas of planting that are dominated by perennials, but also include many shrubs, native sub-shrubs and annuals. It is exuberant, diverse and eclectic, but held together by plentiful repetitions, particularly of *Oenothera lindheimeri*, *Verbena bonariensis* and the fluffy pink-tinted muhly grass *Muhlenbergia capillaris*. In many countries it might not seem a remarkable planting, but in Portugal it really stands out.

In Portugal you are far more likely to see plentiful pots of pelargoniums and ancient cymbidium orchids lining balconies and exterior stairways. In the north of the country you find huge camellias, and large and profusely flowering roses just about everywhere. In early summer, Portuguese villages can be wonderfully colourful, with everything that can flower seemingly blooming all at once. But this is not a tradition that appeals to Margarida. “I want something that looks more natural,” she says. “I like wildflowers. That is what got me interested in making a garden – the wildflowers I remember as a child.”

Many of those wildflowers Margarida remembers are long gone. Much of central and northern Portugal has been planted with eucalyptus. It’s a cash crop, and a useful hedge against adversity for a relatively poor rural population. This has resulted in the suppression of the previous vegetation, itself the outcome of centuries of deforestation and overgrazing, but in places surprisingly diverse. Having decided to make a garden on a site where there was nothing before, Margarida threw herself into understanding horticulture. “It became a passion,” she says. “I had to study, to find out all about plants and about soil.”

Sourcing plants in Portugal is not always easy. The nursery industry here is very traditional, and garden centres have ▶

To continue turn to page 74



In many countries it might not seem a remarkable planting, but in Portugal it really stands out

Eucalyptus globulus trees in the background help link the garden to the wider landscape, while tall clumps of pampas grass, *Cortaderia selloana*, give structure to the airier plantings in front – although Margarida plans to take out this problematic invasive species soon. In the foreground a clump of *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' adds contrasting colour to the mix of green and silver foliage.

An eclectic mix of plants in diverse colours and textures, including a bright-orange *Kniphofia uvaria* cultivar towering above fawn-coloured swathes of *Stipa tenuissima*. In the foreground, flashes of colour come from yellow *Oenothera biennis*, magenta *Lychnis coronaria*, purple *Ixolirion tataricum* and the bi-colour *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Uptick Gold and Bronze'.





Key Mediterranean zone plants

1 *Canna* An unknown cultivar, but possibly C. 'Endeavour'. Invaluable for their foliage, cannas are popular in Portugal, and while they naturally inhabit damp places, they seem to flourish without any irrigation. Height and spread: 1.5m x 50cm. RHS H3[†].

2 *Oenothera lindheimeri* White flowers flutter above other plants all summer long. Incredibly tolerant of heat (dry or humid), but not reliably perennial in cool summer climates. 1.2m x 60cm. AGM*. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.

3 *Lychnis coronaria* A cottage-garden staple. Its silvery foliage is a feature before the flowers. Biennial or short-lived perennial but usually self-seeding. 70cm x 45cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

4 *Salvia microphylla* From a summer rainfall climate but tolerant of Mediterranean summers. Long-flowering; best with a hard winter prune. 70cm x 75cm. RHS H4, USDA 7a-10b.

5 *Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish' A long-flowering salvia with attractively lush-looking dark foliage. Less tolerant of drought than most. 1m x 60cm. RHS H3, USDA 9a-11.

6 *Helichrysum italicum* A dense sub-shrub, with yellow, button flowers and silver foliage, which as its common name of curry plant suggests, is strongly scented. Best in a sunny position and pruned regularly. 60cm x 80cm. RHS H4, USDA 8b-11.

7 *Tulbaghia violacea* Now much used by landscapers in the region – a great recommendation for toughness and drought-tolerance. Will spread to form dense clumps. 55cm x 25cm. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 7a-10b.

8 *Verbena bonariensis* A riverside plant by nature, but copes with dry summers. It's effectively biennial, but often self-seeds. Adored by pollinators. 1.5m x 45cm. AGM. RHS H4, USDA 7a-11.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. [†]Hardiness ratings given where available.



Margarida's planting tips

While Margarida's garden is dominated by perennials, a smaller number of woody plants play a significant role in her planting. They help to break up the space, define smaller areas, and potentially boost wildlife interest well above what perennial-only plantings can do.

Evergreens with distinct shapes, such as the classic Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) or box (*Buxus sempervirens*), help provide structure, while shrubs that are native to the region, such as species of *Cistus*, *Lavandula*, *Phlomis* and *Santolina*, give seasonal continuity and winter interest.

Continuity and repetition are vital in very experimental and eclectic mixes such as this, otherwise a kind of botanical chaos ensues. Margarida has a number of plants she is very fond of and which can easily be increased by seed. *Oenothera lindheimeri* and *Verbena bonariensis* are good examples, and both play a similar role: they are very slight in stature and so can fit into tight spaces between bulkier plants; both have flowerheads that can 'float' above other plants; and both flower for a very long time.

Grasses are great plants for repetition too, especially since they are 'quiet' in colour terms and have a very long season. A favourite here is *Muhlenbergia capillaris*, with pink candy-floss flowers in summer. The season tends to end with asters, of which there are a great many, in number and variety, ensuring that the garden year finishes with a grand finale.

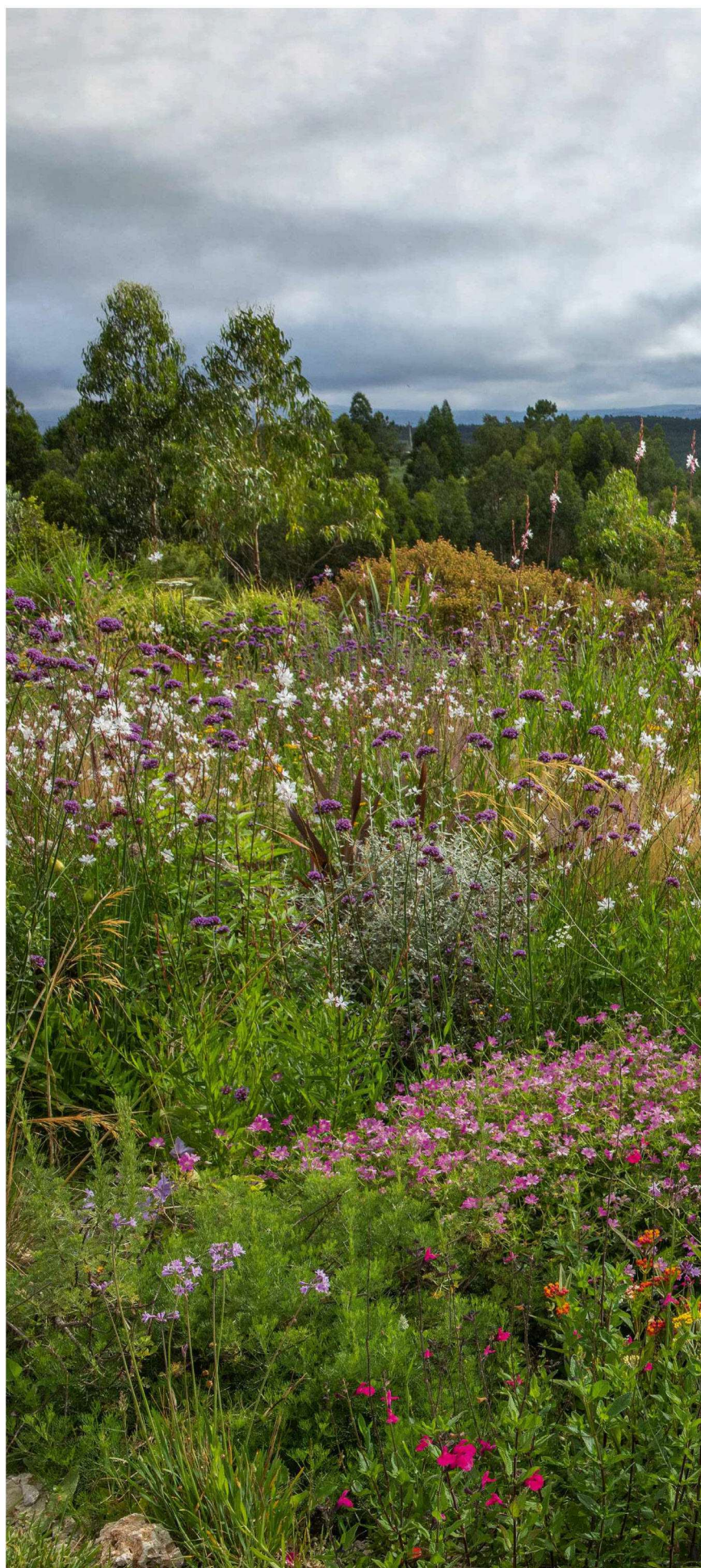
▷ a tendency to import plants from the Netherlands or Italy without paying too much consideration as to how well they will do in the local climate. Perennials are particularly hard to come by. Many of Margarida's were bought from French nurseries, as well as other nurseries across Europe. Sadly, since Brexit, British nurseries are largely beyond her reach. She also saves seed, which enables her to bulk up quantities of favourite plants, and has acquired some plants from her sister. "She goes to Lidl," says Margarida, laughing, while admitting that the budget supermarket has provided her with some good *Echinacea*.

A limited source of plants is not Margarida's only problem. Her heavy alkaline soil means many plants, including dahlias, are smaller than she would like. But although she would clearly prefer lush growth, she has read books by the French nurseryman and dry-planting guru Olivier Filippi, so she's aware of more contemporary thinking that downplays the importance of fertility and stresses the virtues of 'lean growing'. The property has a borehole, so water is not a problem, but Margarida certainly doesn't water in the 'blanket' way favoured by many gardeners in the Mediterranean region. Instead, she takes a selective approach, watering particularly 'thirsty' plants and new seedlings.

While the images she posts on Instagram of her own garden continue to delight many, she admits her own sources of inspiration are limited. "I haven't visited many gardens," she says, "but I follow Piet Oudolf, Tom Stuart-Smith and many others on Instagram." Recently, however, after a successful career of 41 years, based in the hospital in the nearby city of Santarém, she has retired. Now, she not only has more time to devote to her garden, but she is also planning to broaden her horizons through travel. Once she has had a chance to see some of the gardens she has so far only viewed through the prism of social media, it will be exciting to see what she does next. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Follow Margarida on Instagram @margarida.sa.maia



Margarida takes a selective approach, watering particularly 'thirsty' plants and new seedlings

A profusion of grasses and airy plantings of *Oenothera lindheimeri* and *Verbena bonariensis* hide the paths through the garden. The joyful mix of colours ranges from magenta *Salvia microphylla* hybrid, through pink *Geranium endressii* and an apricot hybrid tea rose to the yellows of *Helichrysum italicum* and *Achillea ageratum*, a locally native species.

Sum of the manse

For this walled garden on the edge of the Cairngorms, designer Jonathan Snow has created a sloping parterre filled with flowers and food

WORDS ANNIE GATTI PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM



IN BRIEF

Name Coldstone House.

What Traditionally planted walled garden of a Scottish manse.

Where Aberdeenshire.

Size Walled garden is about one acre.

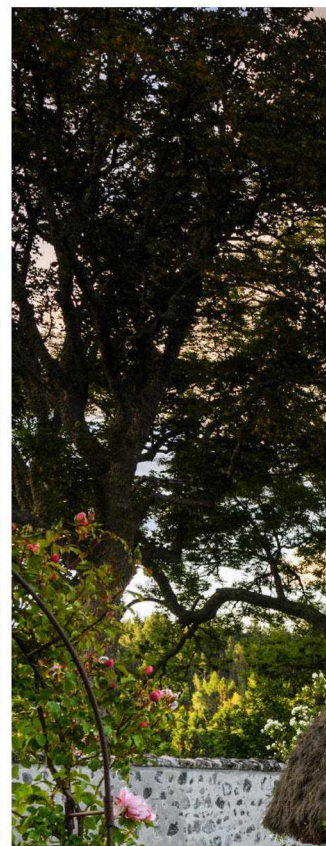
Soil Heavy soil, improved with organic matter.

Climate Cold winters and dry summers.

Hardiness zone USDA 7.

The semi-circular parterre is enclosed by the arc of the curving, lime-mortar-rendered, granite wall. Its three planting zones are linked by grass paths that lead through rose- and clematis-covered arches and past borders where tall and airy plants *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Lavendelturm', *Gillenia trifoliata* and *Cephalaria gigantea* rise above clipped evergreen hedging and the yellow froth of *Alchemilla mollis*.





KEY PLANTS

1 *Delphinium* Black Knight Group

Stylish addition to a cottage-garden scheme with stately spires of deep-blue flowers with black eyes. Loved by pollinators. Height and spread: 1.7m x 75cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-7b⁺.

2 *Cephalaria gigantea*

A wonderful scabious to add height and colour, with airy stems holding pale-yellow flowerheads above aromatic foliage. 2.5m x 1m. RHS H7, USDA 3a-7b.

3 *Gillenia trifoliata*

A great plant for creating a light, airy effect in light shade or in sun. The sprays of starry white flowers are held on reddish stems. 1m x 60cm. AGM*. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9a.

Key plants continue on page 82

Top Dry-stone walls, which are a feature of the surrounding farmland, separate the manse house from the property's outbuildings. Existing maple trees have been retained as they provide a mid-height link to the mature trees beyond.

Right The wall, which is approximately three metres high, provides shelter for the planting but still allows for borrowed views of the mountain Morven. The first metal arch here is festooned with honeysuckle, with a further arch, supporting *Rosa City of York* (= 'Direktör Benschop'), marking the path junctions at the top of the parterre.





When Jonathan Snow was commissioned to design the garden of a former Scottish manse on the edge of the Highlands, he discovered that the owners wanted two

very different approaches: simple and unadorned in front of the house, and full and romantic at the back.

The solution for the front, which has open views across sloping fields and forestry plantation to low hills on the horizon, was clipped yew balls that grounded the white house, calming grass areas and gravel paths.

The back garden slopes up a grassy hill to a striking three-metre-high wall, which arcs in a semi-circle, sheltering the garden and forming its northern boundary. "The owners wanted to grow vegetables and cut flowers. They wanted reasons to walk round the garden, with places to sit, and they wanted the planting to be appropriate to its location," explains Jonathan. A visit with his clients to the Arts and Crafts garden at Crathes Castle established that borders edged with

clipped evergreen hedging and filled with traditional herbaceous planting would work well at the manse.

The back garden is dominated by a tennis court, and hidden from the house behind an existing double line of clipped beech hedging. To create journeys through the space, Jonathan designed a series of planted walks around the tennis court. A curved path that led from the entrance of the back garden directly to the tennis court has been transformed into a delightful walk through an orchard of apple and filbert trees, which is spangled with narcissus, fritillaries and camassias in spring.

The space between the two rows of beech hedges is now filled with rhododendrons, camellias and hydrangeas, providing bursts of colour in spring, summer and autumn. This area gives on to an expanse of grass beneath three established *Sorbus* trees, where the family can play games, and leads to another route past a new border of shade-loving shrubs and perennials to a heather-thatched summerhouse. It is similar to the traditional folly at Braemar Castle, and provides a resting spot half way up the garden. Beyond this is the parterre flower garden, with two more seating places to ▶

To continue turn to page 83

Above The blue of *Campanula persicifolia* and white of *Lupinus* 'Noble Maiden' add a freshness to the upper borders, which are divided from the cut-flower borders by oak trellises. The heather-thatched summerhouse in the background is modelled on a traditional fog hut folly.

The bright blue of *Delphinium* Black Knight Group creates a striking contrast with the yellow flowerheads of *Alchemilla mollis* and subtly blends with the mix of pinks and whites that includes astrantias ('Roma', 'Large White' and 'Star of Billion'), foxgloves, lupins and *Rosa Scepter'd Isle* (= 'Ausland'). The tall, lime-mortar-rendered wall is a common sight in this area. Known as 'auld stane dykes', they were traditionally used to seal out water.



Evolution of a garden

"Chemistry and collaboration make for a much better garden in the long run," explains Jonathan, highlighting how the ultimate success of any garden project relies on the owners committing to a good level of ongoing garden maintenance. It can often be a frustration for designers if there is the expectation that a garden will look after itself once the designer has gone. "A garden evolves," says Jonathan. "It's been said that a garden designer only gets you about half way to a decent garden. How it is looked after in the years after the designer leaves, will ultimately determine its success." At Coldstone, Jonathan is delighted by the ongoing relationship between himself as the designer, the clients and gardener. "This is a plant-heavy garden and the relationship between the three of us is the most important one here."



MORE KEY PLANTS

4 *Echinops ritro* 'Veitch's Blue'

An attractive globe thistle with blue flowers that is visited by hordes of insects. 90cm x 45cm. RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.

5 *Rosa Scepter'd Isle* (= 'Ausland')

This shrub rose produces numerous fragrant, semi-double, pale-pink flowers from summer through to autumn. 1.2m x 75cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-10b.

6 *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Lavendelturm'

A great plant for adding height to a border, with spikes of pale-lavender flowers from July to September above deep-green leaves. 1.5m x 45cm. AGM*. RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

†Hardiness ratings given where available.

Top The sheltered terrace at the side of the house enjoys uninterrupted views of the rolling landscape to the southeast. Yellow rattle has been added to the areas of long grass to allow wildflowers to become established.

Right The planting between the restored barns is a calming combination of clipped yew forms and multi-stem *Prunus* 'Accolade'. The barns have been finished with the same pale render as the semi-circular garden wall on the slope above them.





▷ enjoy the views. Jonathan's design for the top section includes multiple routes to the seating area at the base of the wall, which shapes the garden into a squashed semi-circle. "The idea came to me to create a series of access paths at different angles, like the spokes of a wheel." He divided the space into three zones – bottom, middle and upper – with the planting in each one a combination of plants for spring, summer and autumn.

The bottom zone consists of two long beds, which sit either side of a box-edged curved bed filled with a mix of shrubs, perennials and bulbs. The shrubs, Jonathan explains, create a visual link to the ones he has incorporated in the borders around the tennis court. The middle zone is an arc of four beds, with the two outer ones filled with fruit and vegetables, and the inner ones with stands of cut flowers.

As the cut-flower beds are at the heart of the parterre, it is important they look good all through the growing season. "They are planted in lines so that they sit comfortably with the adjoining vegetable beds." Generous plantings of annuals, bulbs, including tulips and alliums, and perennials, such as peonies, astrantias, echinops and roses, ensure the beds don't look gappy

once stems are picked. A line of oak trellising forms a secondary arc parallel to the wall, creating a subtle division between the top of the vegetable and cut-flower beds and the bottom of the four upper zone beds on either side of the top grassy path. Here, metal arches planted with roses, honeysuckle and clematis mark the junctions between paths, and yew pyramids frame the top seating area. Fruit trees, including plum, quince and pear, are trained against the south-facing wall.

Although May and June can be surprisingly chilly this far north, and winter temperatures can plummet to -15°C, the protection afforded by the wall and Jonathan's choice of hardy plants means that in midsummer the beds are a lush medley of roses, peonies, delphiniums, campanulas and veronicastrums. By early October, it's sedums, geraniums, anemones and *Thalictrum delavayi* that reward journeys to the top of the garden. Then the garden rests until the first bulbs emerge again in early spring. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Jonathan's work at jonathansnowdesign.co.uk

Above Clipped box hedges surround beds filled with vegetables including lettuce and kale, and cut flowers, such as cosmos, xerochrysum and sweet peas, which climb up a hazel support framework.



IN BRIEF

What An exotic, plantsperson's paradise in a small suburban garden.

Where Surrey.

Size 8m x 19m.

Soil Clay, heavily modified in parts.

Climate Temperate, south-facing garden.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Exotic mix

In his own small Surrey garden, designer Robert Stacewicz has assembled an eclectic mix of exotic plants that are well suited for a changing climate

WORDS RORY DUSOIR PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS



Robert confines his cacti and other xerophytes that need sharp drainage to the area close to the house, with a selection, including this impressive prickly pear, *Opuntia robusta*, with its large glaucous leaves grown in containers on the decking.



GARDEN SMALL

Visitors to Robert Stacewicz's small urban garden marvel at the speed and extent of its transformation. He took possession of a fairly featureless rectangular patch of lawn in autumn 2019, started work on it the following spring, and by summer 2022 the garden was ready for the *Gardeners' World* cameras. The space now works on multiple levels: as a haven for biodiversity, as a place of huge interest for plant-lovers, and as an atmospheric retreat from the real world of traffic and suburbia outside. But in a way, this act of creation has not been sudden at all, for it is the product of half a lifetime spent dreaming of and collecting interesting plants.

Robert has travelled widely, to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and several countries in southeast Asia, including Singapore and Indonesia. The flora of each country he visits has been a source of endless fascination to him and ultimately of inspiration for his garden design practice as well as the creation of his own garden. And he has collected plants from a network of nurserymen and friends over more than a decade, hauling them around in pots or sometimes asking other enthusiasts look after them for a while.

There are many big personalities in his borders jostling for attention, but it would be a mistake to view this garden as a mere collection of interesting plants. It is clearly important to Robert that they combine well to create a balanced picture overall. "I wasn't too focused on fussy ▷

4 KEY PLANTS

1 *Agave ovatifolia* Hardy in mild areas with protection from winter wet. Height and spread: 1.5m x 1.5m. RHS H3, USDA 7a-11[†].

2 *Cordyline australis* 'Karo Kiri' Its shortened leaves are borne over a greater length of trunk than other cabbage trees, not in a tufty rosette at the top. 2m x 50cm. USDA 9a-11.

3 *Brahea edulis* Has luxuriantly proportioned leaves that bring glamour to exotic plantings. Surprisingly hardy with good drainage. 9m x 4m. USDA 9a-11.

4 *Hedychium* 'Jackie' A new hybrid with *H. gardnerianum* in its parentage, inheriting much of its glamour but harder. 1.2m x 80cm.

[†]Hardiness ratings given where available.



Above Surrounded by a mix of sun-loving *Cosmos sulphureus*, several statuesque plants are instantly evocative of their arid native habitats, including the large, glaucous rosette of *Agave ovatifolia*, the columnar cactus *Leucostele terscheckii* and one of Robert's most cherished plants, an impressive specimen of the rare *Yucca queretaroensis* with its shimmering rosette of narrow leaves atop a sturdy trunk. "A friend looked after that for many years," says Robert. "I am grateful that he was willing to give it back."

▷ landscaping details when I built this garden," says Robert. "I knew that the plants would cast their spell over the space once they got going. I had a clear vision of where each key plant would go, made up a rough sketch and got going with the installation."

Probably the biggest task that he faced was digging out the three ponds. Two small (but deep, at almost 1m) rectangular ponds flank the main path and mark the transition up to a higher level (the garden rises north to south as you walk up it from the back of the house). There is also a larger, circular pond at the heart of the upper garden. He dug out all the soil by hand and removed it by barrow to the front garden. It was heavy clay, and a back-breaking labour, but more than worth it to Robert. The ponds are now a great boon for biodiversity as well as an opportunity to indulge his love for aquatic and marginal plants, such as waterlilies.

Robert also installed a path of self-binding gravel, which winds gently up to the cabin at the back of the garden. This is retained simply with oak timbers to create steps at the change of levels. But it is the plants that hold sway here and articulate the space. There are two distinct zones of vegetation. An impressive range of cacti and other xerophytes inhabit the foreground, taking advantage of the south-facing aspect at the back of the house. Very sharp drainage is key to their survival – Robert has mixed, in varying degrees, considerable quantities of spent cactus compost, hydroleca and some of the self-binding gravel used to create the path. This is quite prominent on the surface of the beds and creates a pleasing visual link with the rest of the garden. As the

Mixing big ideas in a small space

Planting 'exotics' is particularly well-suited to smaller garden spaces.

The famous exotic garden at Great Dixter in East Sussex benefits from almost total enclosure by yew hedges. Not only does this sheltered location protect broad-leaved tropicals from strong winds, it helps to transport visitors to a strange and completely different world.

More is more (within reason). Don't be afraid to plant boldly in a small space. An empty garden feels much smaller than a heavily planted one. Robert has skilfully broken up the space with his planting so it no longer feels like an 19m x 8m rectangle.

Blur the boundaries. Do whatever you can to disguise the boundaries of your property. Robert has used rampant deciduous climbers, such as passifloras and the hardy *Cobaea pringlei*, to turn his fences into lush green walls, helping to sustain the illusion of a much bigger space.

Get into the detail. Robert has the aim of colonising every square centimetre of his garden with carpeting herbaceous plants such as *Parochetus communis* subsp. *africanus*, *Viola hederacea* and interesting ferns such as *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*. This enhances the atmosphere and adds depth to the planting.

Choose wisely. You don't need to be as ambitious in your plant choices as Robert, who is prepared to accept the occasional heartbreak that results from gardening experimentally. Some seemingly glamorous and exotic plants, such as *Musa basjoo* and *Tetrapanax papyrifer*, are surprisingly hardy and can form a solid backbone to your planting.



planting progresses toward the shadow of the north-facing cabin, it becomes progressively lush. The tableau of planting around the main pond was inspired by the verdancy of a similar scene at Singapore Botanic Gardens, featuring, in Robert's case, hardy ginger lilies, *Colocasia esculenta* and the banana *Musella lasiocarpa*. Reflecting Robert's ingenuity, the pond banks are partially retained by tree-fern logs – obtained from a friend of a friend who had let them die through lack of irrigation. These are being colonised by *Polypodium* ferns to enhance the jungle-like atmosphere.

Robert suffered a few heart-breaking losses, including a treasured specimen of the grass tree, *Xanthorrhoea australis*, in the exceptionally harsh winter of 2022/23. But he accepts this as the price of his full-throttle approach to gardening, and is determined to continue experimenting. "It's important to find a new range of garden plants that can adapt to the challenges of an ever-harsher climate," he says. New projects include a covered green wall in a lean-to at the side of his house – it seems nothing will dampen the creativity of this exceptional designer any time soon. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Follow Robert on Instagram @robstacewicz



Find tips from Great Dixter's head gardener Fergus Garrett on how to create your own exotic garden at gardensillustrated.com/exoticgarden

Above With an eye to encouraging wildlife and biodiversity, Robert has created three ponds: a large circular pond at the more tropical, higher end near the cabin; and two rectangular ponds that mark the transition from the dry-plants area near the house to lush, more tropical plants higher up. In the foreground, the large, perfectly symmetrical clump of finely textured grass atop an ancient-looking trunk is a treasured specimen of the rare *Xanthorrhoea australis*, known as the grass tree for obvious reasons.

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Design

News, garden design insight and sourcebook



Resilient futures

British garden designer James Basson is one of five designers offered a prestigious 'green card' invitation to create a garden at this year's International Garden Festival at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, in France. The theme is the Resilient Garden, which celebrates the diversity and beauty that can be found in gardens able to withstand a changing climate. James's response is an understated garden, *Le Paysage Microcosmique* (pictured), which he describes as a space in which you can feel totally immersed, but one you could also easily overlook. "It may be missed," he says, "but if you stop to look down, there is much to see." It features plants, such as *Lomelosia*, Jerusalem sage and tree spurge, that are stress tolerators rather than competitors, planted in shallow soil where water is scarce and there is little protection from wind or heat. Until 5 November. domaine-chaumont.fr





TOTAL IMMERSION

Sara Jane Rothwell has softened the hard landscaping of this sloping plot with rich planting that contrasts with the repeated use of Corten-steel features

WORDS KATE JACOBS PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

The brief

The owners of this new-build house in north London – a Swedish couple with three teenage children – brought garden designer Sara Jane Rothwell on board during extensive internal renovations. For the garden, their brief was simple: to fill the space with plants. The owners wanted lots of flowering plants and references to their Swedish heritage, as well as a gazebo getaway for their teenagers.

The plot, a rectangle of around 40m by 16.5m, was not without its challenges. It was sloping and dominated by a rendered retaining wall that snaked, free-form, around the back and one side of the garden. Near the house it bulged out to surround a raised planting bed, which was dominated by scrubby shrubs and a large oak tree, *Quercus robur*. Next to the house, a huge terrace had been paved with dazzling white porcelain tiles, with grass covering the rest of the tiered space. “The white rendered walls were very much ‘in your face’, while the effect of all the tiling was blinding,” recalls Sara Jane.

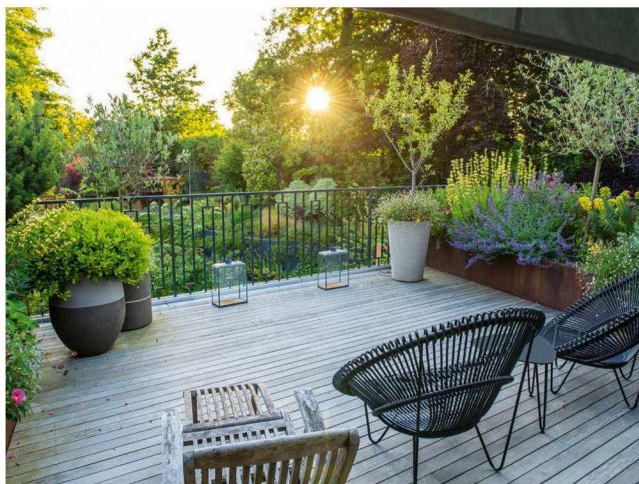
The design

Sara Jane kept the retaining wall, painting it an unobtrusive dark grey that the new planting would quickly screen. At the point where the wall curves out into the centre of the garden, she boosted the sense of width by working laterally across the space, creating full-width gravel patios and planting borders. She replaced the porcelain tiles on the terrace with slate, and reduced its size by adding beds to bring planting closer to the house. A neat path of hardwood boards, laid flush with the slate paving, cuts through the terrace and splits it in two, further lessening its impact.

This path runs from the house to a short flight of Corten-steel steps, which leads up to two stepped patio areas topped with grey limestone chippings. The whole plot is subtly terraced to disguise the garden’s 2.5m slope. The Corten motif continues here with a simple bowl-shaped water feature and an eye-catching sculptural panel. “I think of this as a landing area,” says Sara Jane. “I like to include some breathing space in my designs.” Beyond the gravel sections, poured concrete stepping stones in the lawn lead to a Corten-steel shelter, nestled in a bank of woodland planting.

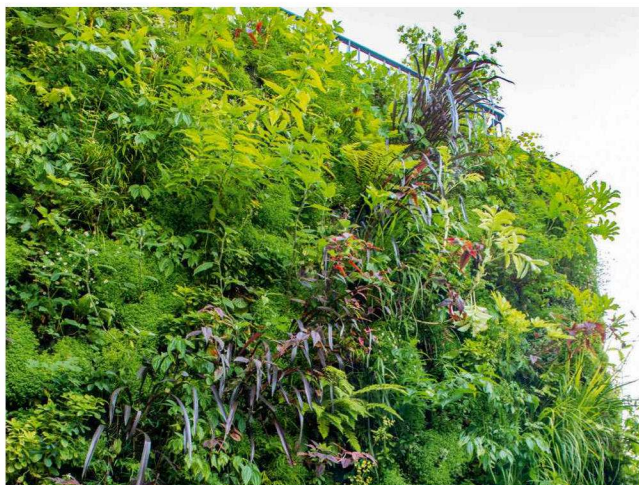
Turn the page for Sara Jane’s design ideas ►

Left Steps in Corten steel lead up through a lush mix of planting below a *Cotoneaster* ‘Cornubia’. Low-growing *Geranium macrorrhizum*, *Geum rivale* ‘Leonard’s Variety’ and *Erigeron karvinskianus* soften the hardwood path that leads out from the house, while on the upper level, tall *Eremurus x isabellinus* ‘Cleopatra’ echo the colour of the facing Corten-steel panel.



The roof terraces

Sara Jane prepared the house's four roof terraces by checking and repairing their waterproofing and assessing their weight-bearing capabilities with a structural engineer, before decking them with hardwood. She designed large, trapezoid-shaped planters, in Corten steel, that break up the rectilinear floorplan of the terraces, and kept the number of smaller containers in check. "I kept it simple with just a few pots from Atelier Vierkant," she says. To connect the terraces with the main garden, Sara Jane has repeated plants including *Erigeron karvinskianus* and *Rosa Thomas à Becket* (= 'Auswinston'), as well as more drought-tolerant species, such as *Cistus x purpureus* and *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low'.



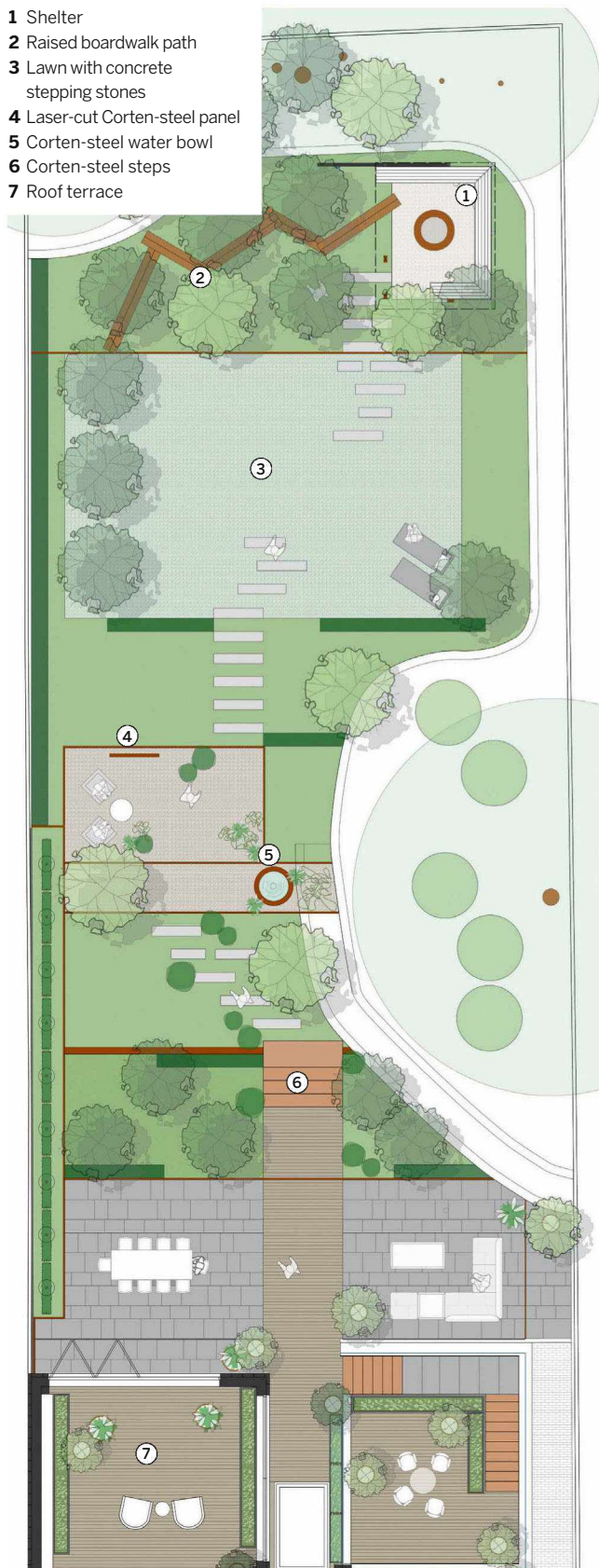
The green wall

To soften the effect of the imposing red-tiled house, the client was keen to explore the option of a living green wall. Using Corten steel, Sara Jane created a sub-frame and channels for the guttering, as well as edging to conceal the sides of the structure. She brought in Adam Shepherd of Tapestry Vertical Gardens. "I gave him the plant list for the garden, but otherwise he had a free rein and specified all his own plants," says Sara Jane. He has referenced the garden's purple theme with *Phormium* Black Velvet (= 'Seivel') and *Persicaria microcephala* 'Red Dragon'. Adam grows his plants in panels and installs them in sections after four to six months of growth. The green wall wraps around the most prominent corner of the house.

Essential elements



- 1 Shelter
- 2 Raised boardwalk path
- 3 Lawn with concrete stepping stones
- 4 Laser-cut Corten-steel panel
- 5 Corten-steel water bowl
- 6 Corten-steel steps
- 7 Roof terrace



The shelter

The clients asked for a secluded 'den' structure at the back of the garden, for their teenage children to retreat to. Since then they've also discovered that it's the perfect sunny spot for morning coffee. It can be accessed by a zig-zagging, raised boardwalk of railway sleepers, building on the atmosphere of secrecy and discovery. Sara Jane designed the shelter to open up on two sides, to better enjoy views across the garden and to provide ventilation for a gas firepit. Built in Corten steel-clad timber, the structure is topped with a sedum roof. "I slightly offset the vertical support posts, so that they don't break up the views," says Sara Jane. Towards the tops of the wall panels, the spacing between the Corten-steel slats increases, allowing glimpses of the shrubs and ferns planted beyond.







The immersive planting

A plant-focused garden was central to the clients' wish to be surrounded by flowers and greenery. As well as removing a few heavy, evergreen trees to bring dappled light into the woodland area, Sara Jane has planted around 25 new trees throughout the garden. These include *Betula pendula* 'Zwitsers Glorie' and *Pinus mugo*, nodding to the family's Swedish heritage, as well as colourful multi-stem acers and a row of pleached *Parrotia persica* to provide screening from neighbouring properties.

To the rear of the garden, a neighbour's *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra' overhangs the boundary and Sara Jane has brought this into the scheme by repeating it, along with other purple plants including *Cotinus coggygia* 'Royal Purple'. The herbaceous planting features a wide colour palette, which the clients were eager to embrace, with plants such as *Eremurus x isabellinus* 'Cleopatra' playing off the rust-coloured Corten with its salmon-orange tones.

The vivid colours are amplified by Sara Jane's preference for planting in large blocks. Plants including *Hakonechloa macra*, *Geranium Rozanne* (= 'Gerwat'), *Erigeron karvinskianus*, *Dianthus cruentus*, *Sisyrinchium striatum*, *Stipa gigantea*, *Phlox paniculata* 'Blue Paradise', *Achillea millefolium* 'Terracotta', *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Blackfield', *Astrantia* 'Roma', *Rosa Lady of Shalott* (= 'Ausnyson') and *Rosa Boscobel* (= 'Auscousin') blur the lines of the hard landscaping. "A softening, cascading effect is important in terraced or sloping gardens. I want it to feel like the planting is tumbling from back to front."

The focal points

A sculptural panel of laser-cut Corten steel, with an abstract foliage pattern, leads the eye into the garden and marks the transition between the gravel area and the lawn beyond. It was custom made for Sara Jane by Natasha Webb Design. "It's a striking piece but, because it's partially transparent, it has a sense of lightness," says Sara Jane. "The eye is pulled towards it, then encouraged to travel onwards." Its position within the plan was largely intuitive on Sara Jane's part. "Together with the steps and the garden shelter – all in Corten steel – it creates a visual triangle within the space," she explains.

The Corten-steel steps

Beyond the seating area, marking the entrance to the garden proper, is a short flight of low, wide steps in Corten steel, which has been Sara Jane's go-to material of choice for many years. "Corten steel is the protagonist material in this garden, and I use it a lot, generally because it's such a versatile product. You can run it horizontally for 50 metres and not see a join, because it's hidden by the patina. It's easy to install, requiring only box steel posts set in concrete. It's economical, maintenance-free and develops its patina with age. And the colour looks wonderful against areas of planting."

The metal's slightly abrasive finish makes it ideal for these steps, which align with the front and back doors, creating a striking view through the house that culminates with a *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra', while a Corten-steel water bowl, from Urbis, is deliberately positioned slightly off-centre within this vista. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Sara Jane's work at londongardendesigner.com

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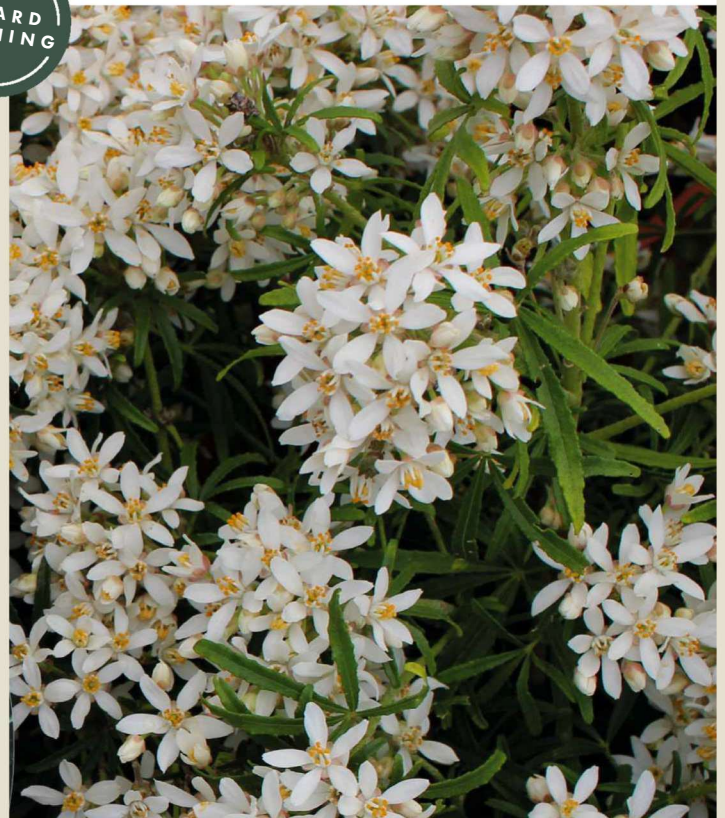
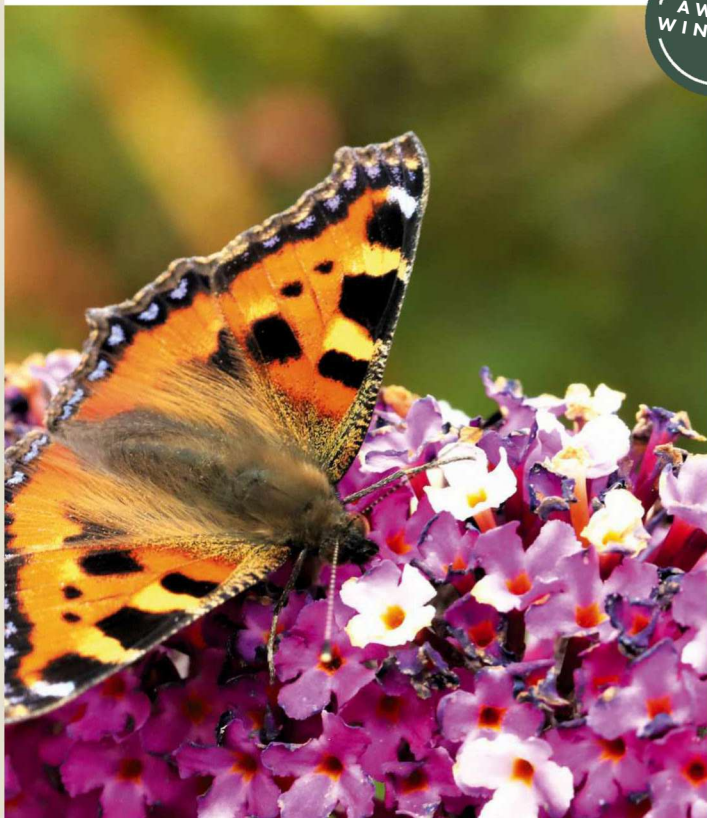
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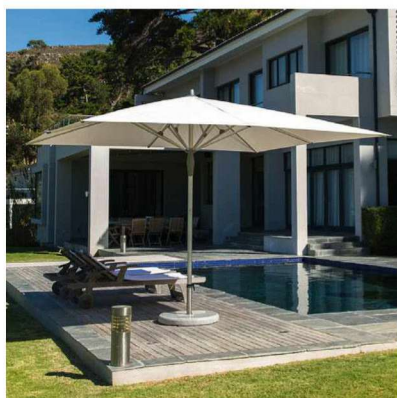
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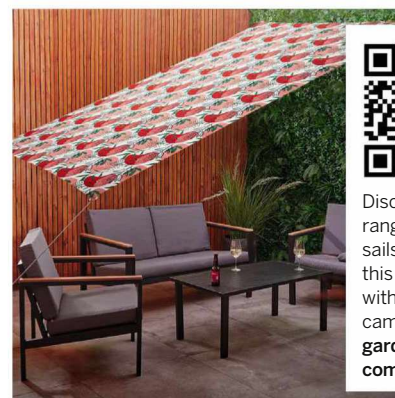
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Le Manoir du Hilguy, Brittany

Last year was a momentous one for Sue Barker. A thrilling Wimbledon, a moving ceremony to mark the centenary of Centre Court, and the publication of her autobiography, *Calling the Shots*. As she starts moving towards retirement, she is determined to carve out some free time to indulge one of her greatest loves, exploring beautiful gardens and the natural world.

Sue's husband worked as a landscape gardener, and they both love to stroll through green spaces admiring the displays and perhaps picking up some inspiration. They enjoy exploring wilder landscapes too. "We have such happy memories of walking in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, an area that is fantastically rich in bird life," says Sue. "Walking along the cliffs, with fantastic views of the sea, that's my idea of heaven."

Sue is a Bondholder with the Holiday Property Bond, which means she has many gardens, grounds and landscapes to discover. As a Bondholder, she can book holidays at over 1,400 properties, in over 30 locations across the UK and Europe. With properties such as Tigh Mor, a magnificent Victorian mansion in the Scottish Trossachs, and Merlewood, a converted country house in the Lake District, Sue's to-do list is already getting full.

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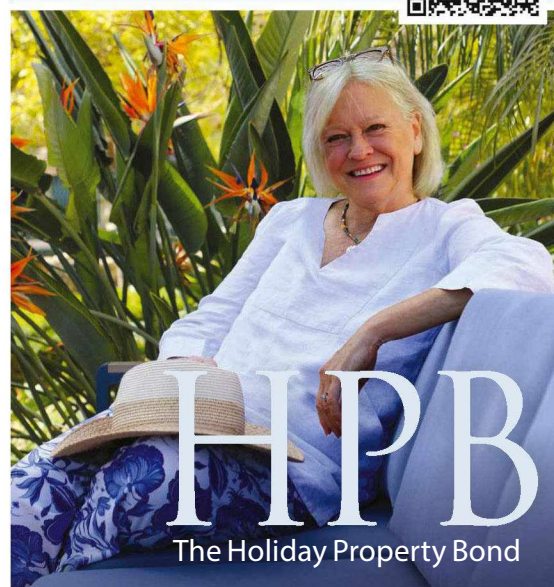
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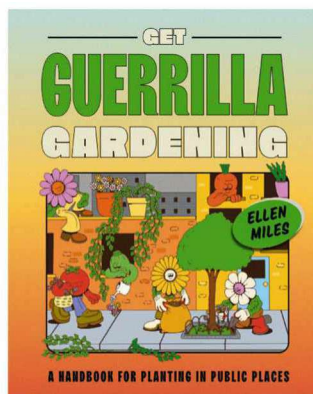
DOWNTOOLS

Book reviews, the crossword, reader event and Alice Vincent



Richard Christiansen's Flamingo Estate in Los Angeles has inspired an extensive nature-focused business and is one of 20 places featured in *The Avant Gardens*, reviewed on page 102.

CHRISTIAN HOGSTEDT, FLAMINGO ESTATE, THE AVANT GARDENS, GESTALTEN 2023



**GET GUERRILLA GARDENING:
A HANDBOOK
FOR PLANTING
IN PUBLIC PLACES**
by Ellen Miles

Dorling Kindersley, £18.99
ISBN 978-0241593349

A practical guide that should give confidence to any gardener who sees the potential in shaping public spaces – even without permission.

Reviewer Richard Reynolds is the founder of GuerrillaGardening.org

It is exactly 50 years since the Green Guerillas began transforming private land in Manhattan without permission, and centuries since gardening illicitly was first documented. For the movement to have the DK treatment – instructional, colourful, simple – is a great endorsement and should further normalise our activity.

Author Ellen Miles became a guerrilla gardener in 2020 and draws on her activity, well-documented best practice and content harvested from prolific social media content creators to compile solid guidance.

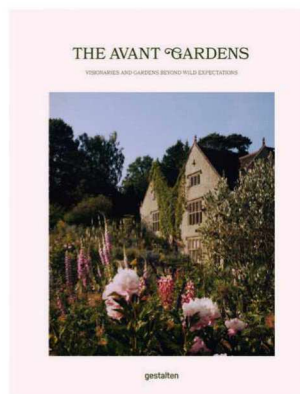
She previously worked for the advertising agency Grey Global Group, has been a council consultant and is founder of Dream Green – so her experience makes her justification for our right to freely garden in public places pithy and compelling.

While Miles is exasperated that we must be 'guerrillas', she values the potential of military metaphors to get people engaged. She is a 'seed bomber' on TikTok and advocates this

and moss graffiti on the book's back cover. But while both methods are dramatic, they are ineffective ways of transforming places and can easily become environmentally damaging.

By redefining guerrilla gardening as only for public places she makes an easier case for guerrilla gardeners' legitimacy but, I believe, disenfranchises both the original Green Guerillas and those who take risks on private land because ownership is ambiguous.

A notable omission is any imagery of thriving, substantial guerrilla gardens of today. These would demonstrate that the approach is sustainable and engage garden lovers. Instead the gardens pictured are mostly tiny, young and often intentionally short-lived. Anthropomorphic plants, such as those in the *Ladybird Garden Gang* books, have taken all the double spread pages, while an image of a beautiful guerrilla garden in New York or any of the mature British examples would have made concrete what readers are left to dream about.



**THE AVANT GARDENS:
VISIONARIES AND GARDENS
BEYOND WILD EXPECTATIONS**
edited by John Tebbs

Gestalten, £40
ISBN 978-3967040968

A tour of 20 significant gardens from around the world – all of which embody a spirit of reinvention and revolution.

Reviewer Lottie Delamain is a garden designer and writer.

It feels as though we're in a potent age for gardens and horticulture. In a post-pandemic world, in the throes of a climate emergency, gardens have become a symbol of hope against the myriad challenges we face, and a reflection of shifting cultural sands we're living through.

This book is a celebration of the visionaries who are reimagining, reinventing and experimenting with the concept of a garden and what it means to garden in these strange times. It's a tribute not just to the gardens, but to the brilliant minds behind them – both the people who created them but also, and importantly, those who tend to them.

It's a beautiful, image-heavy romp through 20 gardens from around the world that captures this spirit of reinvention and quiet revolution. There are some familiar faces (Great Dixter, Gravetye, Hauser & Wirth, Somerset, and Sissinghurst) but also some lesser-known gardens and landscapes that are

refreshing and deeply inspiring. For those who spend a lot of time absorbed in garden imagery, it is a rare treat to be introduced to new gardens and landscapes, especially those abroad that are wrestling with and responding to the same issues in a different vernacular.

The garden profiles are accompanied by a brief overview of the people and process behind them – enough to give some context but not much by way of analysis or detail. Peppered throughout are a series of slightly longer-form essays in which editor John Tebbs explores some of the themes and ideas that unite these landscapes – for example the Dutch New Perennial movement, and rethinking weeds and wilder spaces.

While some of the material feels familiar, there are plenty of less well-known gardens and landscapes to warrant the price tag and fire up the imagination – even for a self-confessed book-a-holic like myself.

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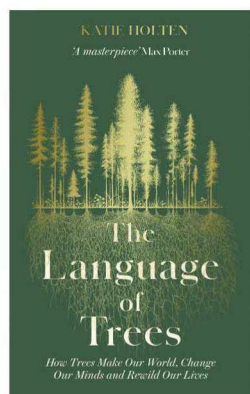


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**THE LANGUAGE OF TREES:
HOW TREES MAKE OUR WORLD,
CHANGE OUR MINDS AND
REWILD OUR LIVES**
by Katie Holten

Elliot & Thompson, £16.99
ISBN 978-1783967483

A collection of thought-provoking pieces of writing and poetry about trees and their importance to us that should appeal to anyone fascinated by trees.

Reviewer Lia Leendertz is the author of *The Almanac 2023*

This beautiful and absorbing book dives into the world of the tree from the point of view of writers, poets and artists, ecologists and activists. It has been curated by Irish artist and activist Katie Holten, whose work is concerned with the environment and who has represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale.

She has brought together a number of different people who think the most deeply about trees to share their thoughts. Among this group is a member of the Ojibwe (an indigenous people from southern Canada) who talks about the new year beginning with the shooting of the maple sugar bush. There is also a scientist discussing the nature of branching (who drops in the fascinating observation by Leonardo da Vinci that 'all the branches of a tree at every stage of its height, when put together, are equal in thickness to the trunk below them'). Then there is a veteran tree-sitter, on sitting chained to the crown of a vast oak

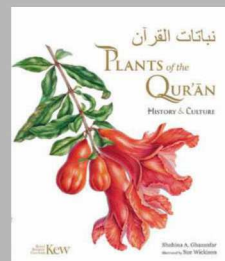
while an entire forest of pristine Californian oak woodland is turned to wood chippings around them, and a great many more writers on all sorts of topics: the migration of trees, the fungal network beneath the forest, tree etymology, and much, much more.

Interspersed throughout are poems on trees, recipes for acorn bread and oak gall ink, and even a contribution from Plato. Most of the entries are fairly short, just a page or two, which makes this an ideal book for dipping into, while a few entries go into greater depth.

Where the book doesn't work quite so well – for me at least – is in the descriptions from visual artists, none of which are backed up with images. The book is illustrated throughout by Holten herself, which gives it a beautiful unity but does leave you puzzling at points. That aside, this is a lovely resource overall for anyone who is fascinated by trees.

Other books

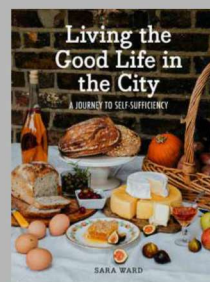
Fascinating histories of plants, from those mentioned in the Qur'an to orchids, are among the best of the rest of July's books.



PLANTS OF THE QUR'AN

by Shahina A Ghazanfar,
illustrations by Sue Wickison
Kew Publishing, £25
ISBN 978-1842467176

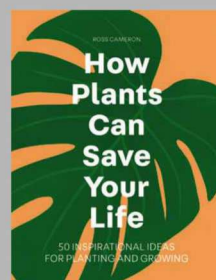
The first book to explore the history and significance of the plants mentioned in the Qur'an, from pomegranates to ginger and garlic.



**LIVING THE GOOD LIFE
IN THE CITY**

by Sara Ward
Pimpernel Press, £22
ISBN 978-1914902956

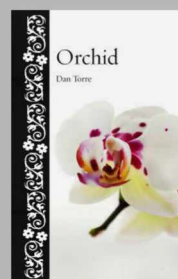
Sara Ward, who has transformed her terraced house in London into an urban smallholding, shares ways to bring city and country together.



**HOW PLANTS CAN SAVE
YOUR LIFE**

by Ross Cameron
Greenfinch, £25
ISBN 978-1529421958

A look at how the natural world can positively impact our wellbeing, from an academic at the University of Sheffield.



ORCHID

by Dan Torre
Reaktion Books, £18
ISBN 978-1789147087

Explores the intriguing and multifaceted natural, cultural and social history of the orchid, which makes up around 8 per cent of all the Earth's flowering species.



A HOME FOR EVERY PLANT

by Matthew Biggs
Phaidon, £19.95
ISBN 978-1838665937

Biggs sets out to cure 'plant blindness' in children by introducing them to fascinating plants from around the world, with beautiful illustrations by Lucila Perini.



Ilex Nellie R Stevens



Ligustrum japonicum (pleached)



Magnolia grandiflora

CREATING PRIVACY WITH SCREENING TREES



Photinia Red Robin

Privacy in gardens can be created using trees to hide or screen out an undesirable view. Trees grown for this purpose often have a clear stem up to fence panel height around 1.8-2m with a full bushy canopy above, forming a good screen above the fence line. This type of screening is particularly useful if the garden is overlooked by neighbouring properties or to retain lower-level exposure to an attractive wall or area.

Semi-mature trees can be planted to achieve effective screening from the offset with evergreens being preferred for this purpose as they screen throughout the year. However, a planting scheme that includes deciduous trees can provide rich contrast and seasonal interest.

Screening Trees

Practicality Brown can supply a range of top quality trees for screening, which are particularly useful for creating privacy. This is our selection of the best screening trees, and all are in stock at our nursery in Iver, Bucks:

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- Ilex castaneifolia
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- Magnolia grandiflora
- Osmanthus aquifolium
- Photinia fraseri 'Red Robin'
- Pinus nigra
- Prunus laurocerasus 'Novita'
- Viburnum lucidum

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The Plant Library at Serge Hill

A day with Tom Stuart-Smith at Serge Hill

Join our exclusive reader day this August at the Hertfordshire home of Tom and Sue Stuart-Smith, and see the exciting new projects they are in the process of creating there

As well as a guided tour of Tom and Sue's famous **Barn Garden**, and time to enjoy the prairie garden and meadows, the day will offer an opportunity to explore the new **Plant Library** of Tom's design studio, and a chance to discover the diverse elements of the new **Serge Hill Project** for Gardening, Creativity and Health.

Tom and Sue will be on hand to explain their ethos and guide tours of the various spaces, along with Plant Library head gardener **Millie Souter**. Be among the first visitors to experience all the elements of the Serge Hill Project as it is being developed, including the barn-like eco-building designed by the couple's architect son, and gain insight into their work, from designer Tom's landscapes to psychotherapist Sue's book *The Well-Gardened Mind*.

Gardens Illustrated reserves the right to change any element of any event due to circumstances beyond its reasonable control.

THURSDAY 31 AUGUST 2023 EVENT DETAILS

Price: £160 per person, including lunch and refreshments.

Programme

10am Arrival; coffee and tea

10.30am Welcome and introduction to the Serge Hill Project with Tom and Sue Stuart-Smith

11am Tour of the Plant Library and Orchard with Tom and head gardener Millie Souter, and time to explore

1pm Lunch

2pm Walking tour of the Barn Garden with Tom

3pm Refreshments

3.15pm Q&A with Tom and Sue

4pm Depart

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(2 days a week (Wed & Thu), 10.30am–3.15pm, plus 2 days homework)

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Garden of Medicinal Plants – Chelsea Physic Garden

Photo: R Alexander

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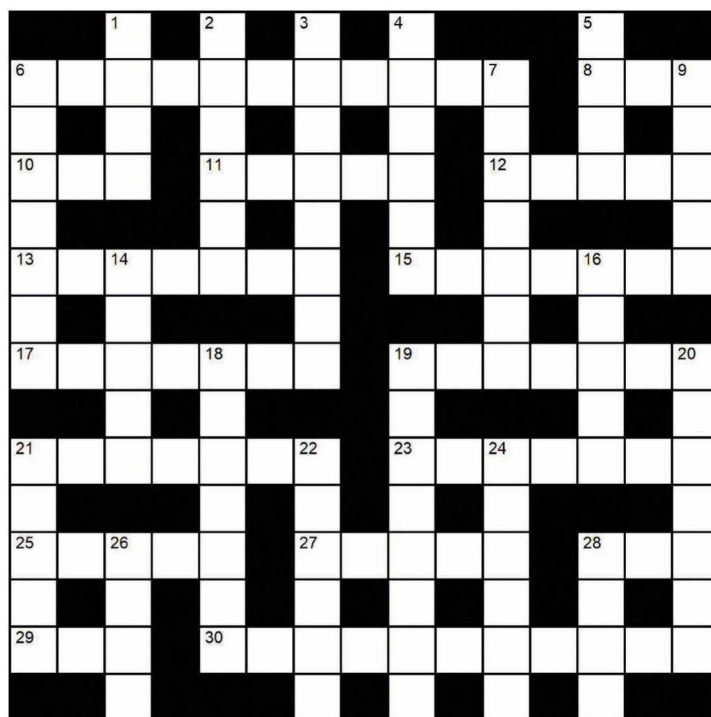
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Crossword



ACROSS

- 6 Genus of spiny shrub, Japanese quince – 'Chelsea omen' possibly (11)
8 Extent of a root's growth ... needs some pruning (3)
10 A larva might emerge from this – for example by gravity initially (3)
11 Term for a shrub that protects a young plant – state registered? (5)
12 Charles Dowding's gardening method with minimal soil disturbance (2-3)
13 A named rogersia with tall flower spikes – a source of shade from the sun (7)
15 ____ flower, one of calceolaria's common names – found in cowslip perhaps (7)
17 Genus of perennials in the ginger (Zingiberaceae) family, with orchid-like flowers – oddly coarse with nothing inside (7)
19 Species name meaning 'common' (7)
21 Frost-hardy orchid – requires sort of open lie (7)
23 Person who goes on and on about a trailing plant? (7)
25 ____ Pearmain, crispy dessert apple – the first man's? (5)
27 A dusky purple dianthus – 'Tempest'? (5)
28 Hazelnut; also male swan (3)
29 Little love apple ... in potato maincrop (3)
30 Hellebore-like plant with green flowers turning pink – a shame it all spoilt (11)

DOWN

- 1 Trail down, like *Surfinia* petunias (4)
2 The pineapple genus – other fruits with top removed! (6)
3/21 *Darmera peltata*, also called 'Indian rhubarb' – from broily factory? (8,5)
4 Catkin-bearing trees right inside Dales, perhaps? (6)
5 Very dry part of cultivar I dampened (4)
6 Virginia sort is *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (7)
7 A large-flowered series of *Portulaca grandiflora* – timely garden item? (7)
9 Species of 'Christmas rose' aka 'Black hellebore' referring to its root colour (5)
14 A pink-flowering sempervivum with a green rosette – osier maybe? (5)
16 A gem of a white-flowering streptocarpus? (5)
18 A Glendoick rhododendron with reddish-purple flowers; small marsupial (7)
19 ____ *fasciculata*, prairie plant 'Ironweed' – cultivated on ravine (8)
20 Genus of a non-native aster – bay rue, I modified (7)
21 See 3 down
22 *Iris* ____ (Japanese water iris), with sword-shaped leaves – in gardens at Alnwick (6)
24 Genus of 'sensitive plant' variety of 'Maoism' (6)
26 ____ *majus*, common name 'false bishop's weed' ... in cream milfoil (4)
28 Hollow stem of eg bamboo ... starts to curl under leaf mould (4)

• Solutions to this issue's crossword will be printed in the Summer issue

SOLUTIONS TO JUNE CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Stolon 5 Inverewe 9 Desiree 10 Nantes 11/7 Tree rings 12 Axils 13 Sasa 14 Bee balm 16 Action 18 Pleach 20 Yew tree 22 Pear 24 Drift 26 Edge 28 Diablo 29 Thistle 30 Parahebe 31 Silene. DOWN 2 Tudor 3 Lespedeza 4 Nirvana 5 Iveyi 6 Venusta 8 Whetstone 14 Ballerina 15 May 17 Tormentil 19 Hidcote 21 Withies 23 Rubia 25/27 In the green.

Summer gardens to visit

Summer is a great time to visit this collection of glorious gardens



1 ASHRIDGE HOUSE

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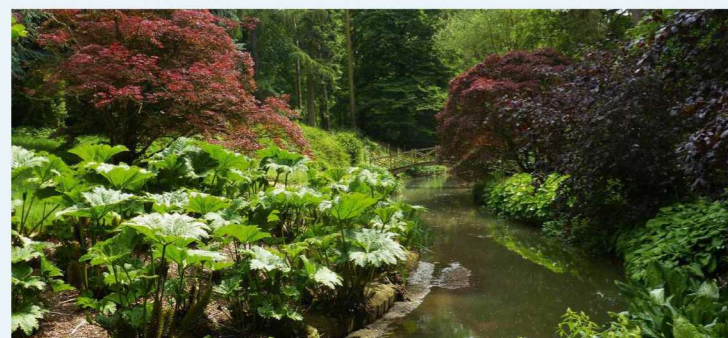
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2 KELMARSH HALL AND GARDENS

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Kelmarsh, Northants NN6 9LY | enquiries@kelmarsh.com | kelmarsh.com



4 COTTESBROOKE HALL & GARDENS

July at Cottesbrooke sees late-season perennials, such as dahlias, salvias and agapanthus, flourish in the borders. In the Wild Garden, the giant gunneras, rodgersias and persicarias are at their peak providing a lush, shady escape from the heat of summer.

Northampton NN6 8PF | 01604 505808 | cottesbrooke.co.uk



3 DYFFRYN GARDENS, NATIONAL TRUST

Take a summer stroll round these 55-acre, Grade I-listed gardens. Pick up a seasonal map at the Welcome Centre and explore a diverse collection of summer plants in the Fernery, Arboretum and Garden Rooms, including the Herbaceous Border, Paved Court and Kitchen Gardens.

St Nicholas, Vale of Glamorgan CF5 6FZ | nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens



5 DUNVEGAN CASTLE GARDENS

July is the perfect time to visit this hidden oasis. With herbaceous borders set to explode into colour, cascading waterfalls and shimmering pools, there is something to delight all visitors, including a castle steeped in history and seal boat trips.

Dunvegan, Isle of Skye IV55 8WF | 01470 521206 | dunvegancastle.com



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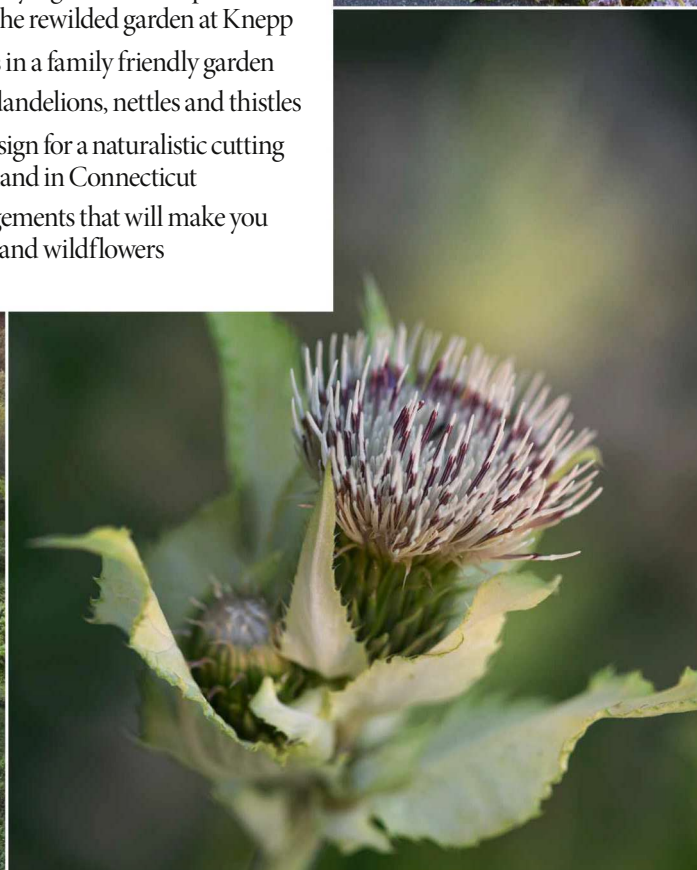


GARDENS

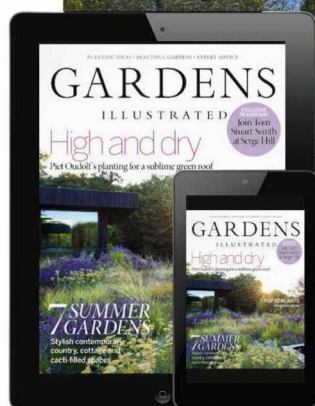
ILLUSTRATED

THE WILD ISSUE

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- Top picks for pollinators in a family friendly garden
- The nursery selling fancy dandelions, nettles and thistles
- Dan Pearson's dreamy design for a naturalistic cutting garden and woodland in Connecticut
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MAKING THE CUT

A cutting garden may be high on her fantasy garden wishlist, but **Alice Vincent** still finds it hard to cut the flowers from her borders. Could seasonal floristry help to win her round?

ILLUSTRATION ALICE PATTULLO

I noticed the shift in March; the last blast of wintry weather may have had something to do with it. As the smörgåsbord of narcissi I planted two autumns ago came to fruition, I was tempted to brave the sideways-driving sleet to run out and gather them up, rather than leave them to pepper the garden with yellow. For someone who grows things to admire, rather than eat, this is the rarely discussed rub: I find it so hard to cut the damn things.

When thinking about my fantasy garden – something I was recently invited to do on the *Gardens Illustrated* podcast – I put in a cut-flower bed. In my imagination, it was tucked away in a sunny corner, conveniently placed for me to nip out on summer mornings, to hack away at the blooms I'd been effortlessly conjuring up over the season (this was my fantasy garden, after all). That way, I could have my cake and eat it: a garden full of flowers for me, the pollinators and the birds to enjoy, and fistfuls of blooms to adorn the house.

Alas, in reality I have the recently traumatised beds in my small, north-facing garden to contend with. Over the years, I've flirted with various kinds of flower growing. There was the sweet pea extravaganza of 2022, and the dahlia explosion of 2021, when the soft coral

of 'Waltzing Mathilda' was replaced by the bright cerise of not one, but two, deliveries of 'Juliet'. The *Ammi majus* that out-grew me was a fun achievement; the mollusc attack on nearly every daffodil going last spring, less so. I've never given cosmos enough room or coddling to create those gorgeous clouds I so often pass on verges in country gardens over the summer, but my chocolate cosmos (bought as plugs – the stubborn, non-germinating seeds defeated me) kept going into late November.

When the garden is most abundant, I have relished cutting bunches for friends who are hosting us, often trying to keep them perky through an hour on the Tube in a heatwave. It's an inherently communal act, giving someone beauty that you have ushered from the earth, especially for those who don't grow or have a garden of their own. It's also a quietly radical one: the more I grow my own flowers, slug-bitten or otherwise, the more I resist those that have been flown in from far-flung climes or grown unsustainably.

With each passing season I'm more offended by a rose in winter, smothered in chemicals and carrying a weighty carbon footprint. It's telling that when people do bring me flowers, they are more likely to be half-a-dozen that

were grown in the UK, wrapped up in brown paper. I am blessed with good friends.

Seasonal floristry is where the organic food movement was 20 years ago, but it's gaining pace. Each year, it seems as though British Flowers Week gains more traction, and there have been a flurry of excellent books promoting a more ecologically sensitive approach to floristry in recent years, including Grace Alexander's *Grow and Gather*; Milli Proust's *From Seed to Bloom*; Anna Potter's *Flower Philosophy*; *How to Grow the Flowers* by Camila Romain and Marianne Mogendorff; and the essential *Cut Flowers* from Celestina Robertson. Between them, they offer more than just swoon-worthy photographs, in their pragmatic approach to growing cut flowers, working with our ever-changeable seasons and, ultimately, making your own kind of beauty.

This summer, my bunches will be more cohesive, thanks to that snazzy new colour scheme I recently introduced, and also, I suspect, more modest: fennel, roses, a lot of foliage. When I was meant to be sowing annuals, I was feeding a baby on three-hourly shifts. Thank goodness I cut the narcissi when I did: a vase full of sunshine when there was none outside. □

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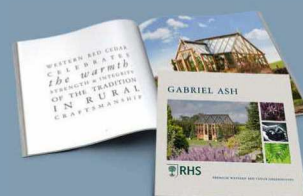
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